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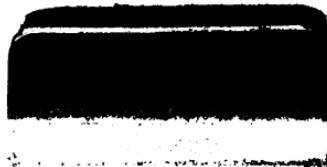
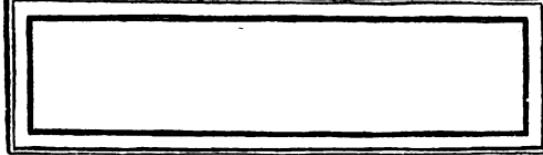
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# Silas Wright

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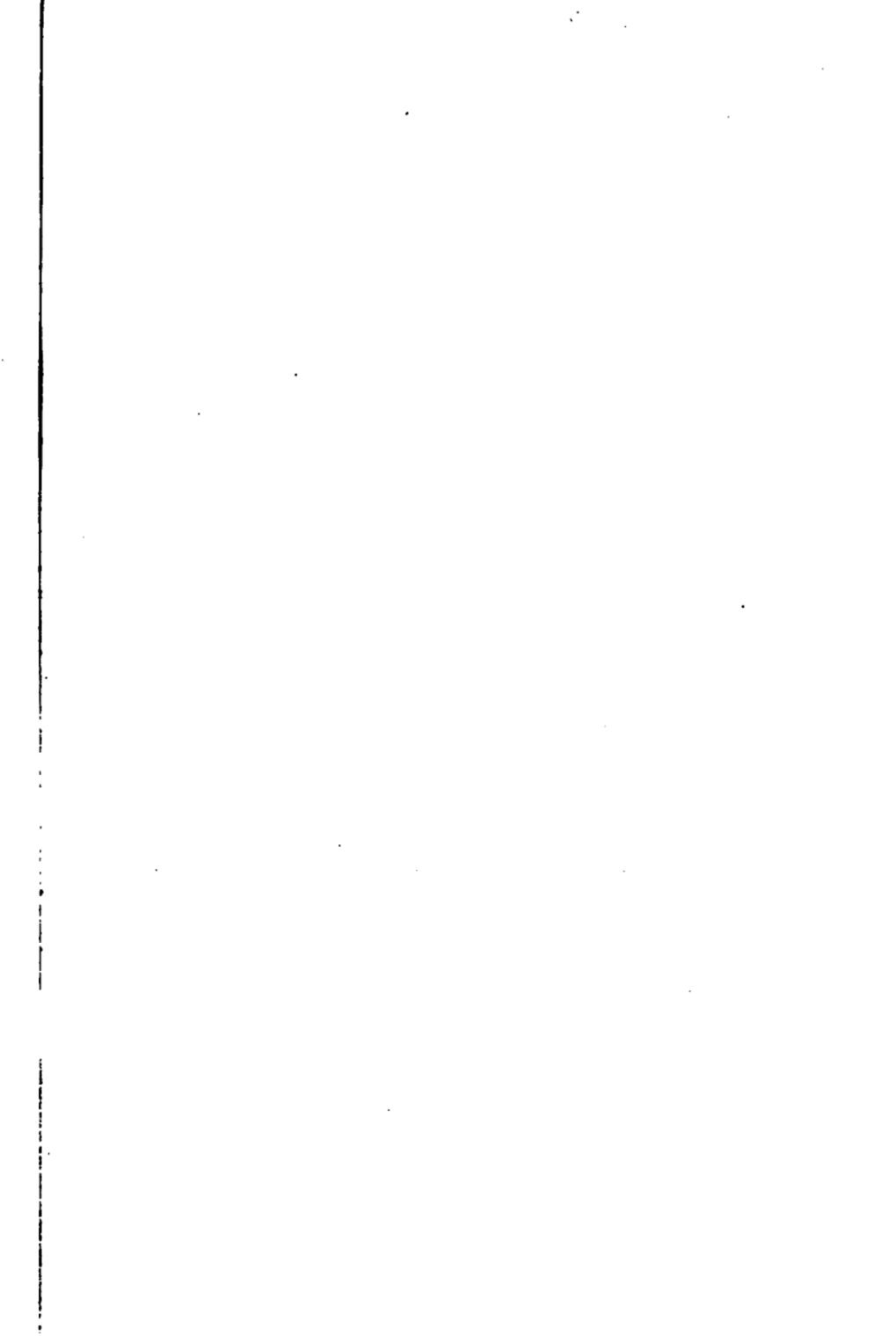


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**SILAS WRIGHT**

A LIFE  
OF  
**SILAS WRIGHT**  
1795-1847

United States Senator from New York 1833-1844  
Governor of the State of New York 1844-1846

BY

William Estabrook Chancellor

Author of "Our Presidents and Their Office", etc. Member, Authors Club, London, Eng., Cosmos Club, Washington, D. C., etc.

*"Man of the millions, thou art lost too soon."*  
*John Greenleaf Whittier*

*"I mean to walk in the footsteps of Silas Wright."*

*William Sulzer*

1918

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## Pithy Sayings of Silas Wright.

“I have never inquired into the degrees of blood of sheep or of men.”

*House, April, 1828.*

“Wrong acts never serve a good cause.”

*Proclamation, Aug., 1846.*

“Our principles possess a strength with our people that our men do not.”

*Correspondence, Feb., 1847.*

“General averages are most deceptive guides.”

*Senate Speech, April, 1844.*

“Stability is essential to healthful commerce. Fluctuations interrupt its channels and increase its hazards.”

*Senate Speech, April, 1844.*

“The sponge of the bankrupt law has wiped away the record of hopeless debt.”

*Senate Speech, April, 1844.*

“Is it possible that a country can be taxed into prosperity?”

*Senate Speech, April, 1844.*

“Equally with the legal, the medical, and the clerical professions, the agricultural requires a thorough and systematic education.”

*Posthumous Address, Saratoga, Sept., 1847.*

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## *The Lost Statesman*

By JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Lines written upon the occasion of the death of Governor Silas Wright, August 27th, 1847 (born 1795).

As they who, tossing midst the storm of night,  
While turning shoreward, where a beacon shone,  
Meet the walled blackness of the heaven alone,  
So, on the turbulent waves of party tossed,  
In gloom and tempest, men have seen thy light  
Quenched in the darkness. At thy hour of noon,  
While life was pleasant to thy undimmed sight,  
And day by day, within thy spirit grew  
A hoiler hope than young Ambition knew,  
As through thy rural quiet, not in vain,  
Pierced the sharp thrill of Freedom's cry of pain,  
Man of the millions, thou art lost too soon!  
Portents at which the bravest stand aghast,—  
The birth-throes of a Future, strange and vast,  
Alarm the land; yet thou, so wise and strong,  
Suddenly summoned to the burial bed,  
Lapped in its slumbers deep and ever long,  
Hear'st not the tumult surging overhead.  
Who now shall rally Freedom's scattering host?  
Who wear the mantle of the leader lost?  
Who stay the march of slavery? He whose voice  
Hath called thee from thy task-field shall not lack  
Yet bolder champions, to beat bravely back  
The wrong which, through His poor ones, reaches Him;  
Yet firmer hands shall Freedom's torchlights trim,  
And wave them high across the abysmal black,  
Till bound, dumb millions there shall see them and rejoice.

Written 10th month, 1847.

## Genealogy of Silas Wright in the Paternal Line.

Lived in

Mass.	Samuel Wright, emigrated to Boston 1630, died 1665
do.	Samuel, junior, born about 1635, was killed 1675
do.	Joseph, do. 1665, died 1697
do.	Samuel, do. 1690, do. after 1740
do.	Samuel, junior, do. 1725, died
Vermont	Silas, do. 1755, died 1840
New York	Silas, junior, born May 24, 1795, died Aug. 27, 1847

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### Governors of New York State during the political career of Silas Wright

### Presidents of the United States

De Witt Clinton	1817-1821 Anti-Fed.	James Monroe
Joseph C. Yates	1822-1823 Dem.	1817-1825
De Witt Clinton	1824-1827 Anti-Fed.	John Quincy Adams
Nathaniel Pitcher	1828 Dem.	1825-1829
Martin Van Buren	1829-1830 Dem.	Andrew Jackson
Enos T. Throop	1831-1832 Dem.	1829-1837
William L. Marcy	1833-1838 Dem.	Martin Van Buren
William H. Seward	1839-1842 Whig.	1837-1841
William C. Bouck	1843-1844 Dem.	William Henry Harrison
Silas Wright, jr.	1845-1846 Dem.	1841
John Young	1847-1848 Dem.	John Tyler
		1841-1845
		James Knox Polk
		1845-1849

## Annals of the Life of Silas Wright.

May 25, 1795	Born at Amherst, Massachusetts.
1796	Removed to Weybridge, Vermont.
1809	Entered Middlebury, Vermont, Academy.
1811	Entered do. College.
1811—1815	Taught school in Vermont, winter terms.
1815	Was graduated from college.
1815—1819	Studied law, taught school, admitted to practice in January, 1819, at Sandy Hill, New York.
October, 1819	Admitted to practice at Canton, Saint Lawrence County, New York State and resided there as home until his death.
February, 1821	Surrogate Saint Lawrence County.
until 1825	Also justice of the peace and commissioner of deeds. Also postmaster. Also pathmaster (roadmaker).
1821—1823	Town clerk. Also inspector of public schools.
1822	Captain of militia. Major, same year.
1826	Colonel.
1827—1829	Brigadier-general of militia.
1828—1827	Member New York State Senate.
1827—1829	Member House of Representatives in Congress.
1829—1833	Comptroller State of New York.
Jan., 4, 1833	Senator of the United States from New York.
until Dec., 1844	
Sept., 11, 1833	Married Clarissa Moody of Canton.
1845—1846	Governor of New York State.
1846	Renominated but defeated.
Aug., 27, 1847	Died of heart disease at Canton.

## Annals of New York State

during the political career of Silas Wright

- 1820 Population, 1,872,111.
- 1821 Constitutional Convention; Federalism ceased to exist.
- 1825 Erie Canal opened by DeWitt Clinton.  
Gas introduced into New York City,
- 1826 Anti-Masonry furore.
- 1827 Slavery was abolished.
- 1829 State had 48 banks.
- 1830 Albany and Schenectady Railway opened.  
Horse-drawn street cars started in New York City.
- 1834 Albany Regency established.  
Calhoun, V. Pres., gave casting vote to prevent service of Van Buren as minister to England.
- 1835 \$20,000,000 fire in New York City.
- 1837 The Panic.
- 1838 Seward, first Whig governor.
- 1841 State Treasury insolvent; payments suspended.  
Erie Railway suspended work, despite loan by State of \$3,000,000 in 1836.
- 1842 Anti-Rent disturbances.  
to  
1852
- 1846 Constitutional Convention abolished court of chancery;  
reduced power of governor to appoint officers, substituting popular election; ended special charters and established general incorporation laws ; and limited debt-making powers of the legislature.
- 1850 Average size of farms 112 acres.  
Banking capital \$56,000,000. 244 banks.  
Annual amount expended for schools \$2,630,000.  
Population 3,097,894.

## Annals of the United States

During the political career of Silas Wright

- 1820 Population, 9,700,000.  
Missouri Compromise (leader, Henry Clay.)
- 1821-5 "Era of Good Feeling" (Second administration of James Monroe.)
- 1821 Andrew Jackson military governor of Florida.
- 1822 National Road extended.
- 1823 Monroe Doctrine published (drafted by J. Q. Adams.)
- 1826 Temperance reform begun (leader, Lyman Beecher.)  
Attempted Pan-American Congress at Panama (J. Q. Adams.)
- 1828 "Tariff of Abominations" enacted (Silas Wright, H. of R.)  
"Rotation in Office" and "Spoils System" (Andrew Jackson.)
- 1830 Webster-Hayne Constitutional debate in Senate.  
Steam railroad operated (engineer, Peter Cooper.)  
320,000 free negroes, 2,000,000 negro slaves,
- 1831 Jan. 1, William Lloyd Garrison began to publish "The Liberator" in Boston.  
Chloroform first used in New York hospitals.
- 1831-40 375,000 whites went west and north from Virginia and 200,000 negroes were sold south.  
Average annual inter-state slave trade, \$100,000,000,  
Almost 2,000,000 foreigners came from Europe.
- 1833 Georgia (advised by Andrew Jackson) nullified an order of U. S. Supreme Court (John Marshall, C. J.)
- 1834 Reaper invented (Cyrus McCormick.)
- 1835 Marshall died, and R. B. Taney became Chief Justice.  
Coal in commercial use.
- 1836 "Remember the Alamo" (Davy Crockett.)  
Charter of Bank of U. S. expired without renewal.  
Height of speculation in public lands.

1837 "The Panic."  
Owen P. Lovejoy, abolitionist editor, murdered in Illinois.

1838 Southern Indians transferred to Indian Territory.

1838-42 Many State governments insolvent; total debts, \$200,000,000.

1839 Canadian government seized rebel vessel, "The Caroline," in American waters. Strong American movement to annex Canada. 50,000 men and \$10,000,000 voted for war. No war.

1840 In Harrison-Van Buren campaign, twelve times as many votes cast as in 1824. Manhood suffrage almost universal.  
Cotton down to 5c. per lb.  
Mormons settled at Nauvoo (Holy City) (leader, Joseph Smith.)  
Cunard line of transatlantic steamers established.  
First independent Treasury (Benton and Wright.)

1842 Webster-Ashburton treaty as to Maine boundary.  
Dorr's Rebellion in R. I. Anti-Rent rioting in N. Y.

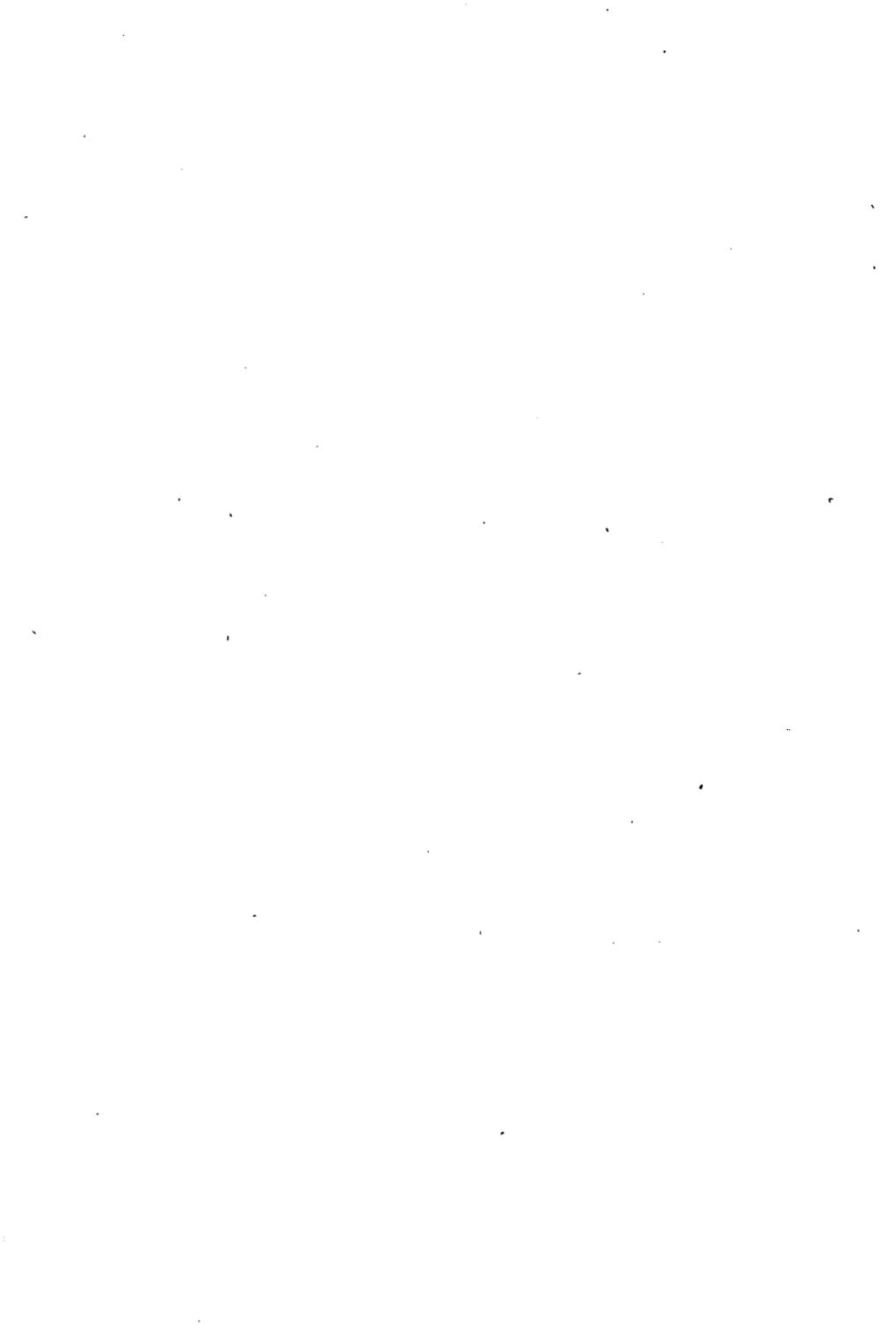
1844 Electric telegraph operated (S. F. B. Morse, inventor.)  
Right of petition carried in House of Representatives (J. Q. Adams.)

1845 Annexation of independent nation, Texas (Calhoun and Tyler.)  
Postage reduced. Two zones — under 500 miles, 5c.; over, 10c.

1846 Sewing machine invented (Elias Howe.)  
Tariff for revenue only (leader, Silas Wright.)  
Independent treasury permanently established (Benton and Wright.)  
Wilmot Proviso.  
Oregon boundary settled by treaty (James Buchanan, Secretary of State.)  
California won (J. C. Fremont, leader.)  
"Name the Spot" Resolutions in House of Representatives (Abraham Lincoln.)

1847 Feb. 27, Zachary Taylor won Buena Vista.  
Aug. 20, Winfield Scott took the City of Mexico.  
Aug. 27, Silas Wright died.

1850 Population, 23,200,000.



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## Silas Wright.

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### Introduction.

A good public servant is one who thinks always first of the general welfare and only second of himself; who thinks well and who accomplishes accordingly. His rule of life is exactly the opposite of that of the man who first takes care of himself; though such a man often succeeds in private affairs and even at times is highly useful to others in public or personal ways.

Silas Wright was characteristically the good public servant who thought first of the welfare of the many and who never thought much of his own affairs; for the public, he thought well and achieved many valuable things, as this brief record shows.

To the present Governor of the State of New York we owe much for recalling to our minds the qualities and the services of one of his ablest and most honorable predecessors in what he properly styles "the next to the highest elective office of the land." Governor William Sulzer

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SILAS WRIGHT

has said that to him Silas Wright is the ideal of the statesman in whose footsteps he desires to follow.

The repeated expression of admiration by a man in high and powerful office is in itself a matter of importance in that it creates an influence upon the minds of many and affects the progress and development of public opinion. Likes and dislikes, admiration and scorn, love and hate reveal the dominant emotions and instincts of the individual, and from them may be read what the man is. What the ruler of a people is vitally concerns them.

For three reasons, it happened to the writer of this book that the various remarks of Governor Sulzer respecting Silas Wright appealed to him profoundly. One was that several years of the youth of the writer were spent in the scenes familiar to the statesman in his early days and that he has often revisited them in later years. There is no more beautiful State in any and every season in the Union than that of the Green Mountains. There are many families of Wrights now in Massachusetts and in Vermont, and a sturdy, honest, amiable and competent race they are. A stronger reason was that the various historical studies that have led to the production of some half dozen volumes upon American themes brought the writer long ago to the opinion that Silas Wright was Presidential timber felled too early by death to real-

ize the true purpose of his being. He had the largeness of life and the frank yet dignified bearing suitable in a President. To the writer's thinking, Wright of New York and Benton of Missouri should be graded higher than Webster or Clay or any other men of their generation excepting only "Old Hickory" himself, who as a man of action was a true genius. But the strongest reason that has led to this record consists in the opinion that in nearly every matter of importance Wright held the true principles of American democracy; he was wiser than any other man of his times in respect to fundamental political philosophy. If he had consented to serve upon the Supreme Court bench, as several Presidents requested, the history of our jurisprudence would probably have been different, and for the better. Why he declined to leave the Senate is recorded herein and perfectly illustrates both his sense of honor and his sincere modesty.

One beautiful fact about the life of Silas Wright is that it has no strain or stain of dishonor or even of minor moral dereliction. The great manuscript volumes of his correspondence are fit for the reading of boys and girls. He was without any faults even of manners. And this goodness was entirely natural. He was simply good, loved fun and humor, worked industriously, was sociable, liked to oblige persons, but was free from willingness to please

them at the expense of any higher principle. He was, indeed, a rare character as well as a notably superior intellect.

Town and county officer, State Senator, Congressman, United States Senator, Governor, Silas Wright went through life unspoiled not because he was free from temptation but because the temptations that conquering marred the characters of many other men and to an extent explain their greater or less failure but because though he lived in the world and was a power in, yet in a true sense, he was not of it. He knew the game but would not play it. Let no man think that the second quarter of the nineteenth century in America was peculiarly free from sin and wickedness. Quite the contrary. It was an epoch of much baseness and shiftiness; it was conspicuously an epoch of low aims and of petty performance.

It is good to dwell upon such lives and upon such men. To do so makes us think well of Americans and of humanity.

But two biographies of Silas Wright have been published hitherto, both within a year or so of his death and both short, inadequate and uncritical. The earlier is by Jenkins and is well written; the second by Hammond is largely but paraphrase of Jenkins's but is superior in that Hammond possessed a vast stock of political information with which to illuminate the personal record. Yet neither had access to

the correspondence which was collected later. Neither of these men had a positive political philosophy of his own and strong convictions. So far as they were impartial, it was mainly the impartiality of indecision. Fortunately for themselves and for their readers, they drew admirably the personal outlines of a good, great man whom each of them loved and admired.

It illustrates the incompetence of most biographical work until the past few years of genetic science (including the theoretic art of human eugenics) that neither biographer mentions so much as even the names of the mother and of the grandmothers of Silas Wright. Each is satisfied to record the tradition that his mother was an uncommonly able and well-educated woman and that she loved this son with a peculiar tenderness as the best-born of her large family. It is doubtful whether now the lineage of Silas Wright in more than the paternal male line can be recovered. The paternal lineage does not, however, wholly account for this Silas who went pioneering in statecraft and blazed a trail for many followers.

Silas Wright was the original sound money Democrat; devised the independent treasury, separating banking from government; held the only defensible view of the tariff that any protection not simply incidental to customs revenue duties is morally wicked and economically unsafe because it prevents a stable equilibrium

of industry and trade; favored a free-labor West like the free-labor North and hoped for the disappearance of negro slavery in the South through the normal operation of ethical as well as of economic forces; feared corporations because they are impersonal, adventurous, cruel and irresponsible, hated and fought corrupt appointments to office and bribery and favoritism in office; opposed and resisted public debts and the consequent establishment of a parasitic bondholding class; encouraged independent private enterprise as the secret of national greatness; believed in telling the people everything; and lived always a poor man on the level with all men. Such was the man who declined a Vice-Presidential nomination and an almost certain election rather than seem to acquiesce in the annexation of Texas and the extension of slavery. Only once was he defeated for office, that in the year of the tidal wave of distrust of the Democratic party that swept over the North because President Polk had deliberately provoked the Mexican War. He was defeated in seeking reëlection as Governor, and yet remained the most popular individual in New York State.

When within a year Silas Wright, long-time Senator of the United States and once Governor of New York, died suddenly of heart disease developed by overwork in August in the hay-fields of his own small farm, all the people of

the State and many others elsewhere knew that the best-loved of American statesmen, the most available of all men for the Presidency itself, had been lost from a nation that needed him and still needs such men.

That had he lived, he would have been nominated in place of Cass in 1848 or of Pierce in 1852 or of Buchanan in 1856, seems certain. With a man like Wright still strong in the Democratic party, there might have been no Republican party in the field in 1856. This speculation upon alternative courses in history is of value only as showing the full measure of a man who dies before his time.

In 1852, Clay passed away at seventy-five years of age, best remembered for the Compromise of 1850; in the same year, Webster died,—shall we remember him best for the seventh of March speech, 1850, delivered at sixty-eight years of age? And Calhoun, born like Webster, in 1782, died in 1850. Benton, born in 1782, lived till 1858. Twelve years younger than any of these men, Wright died first.

All the high services of Washington in the Federal Convention and as President came after the age when Wright's career ended. Young men and old men alike see these things; but middle-aged men in the full tide of mature life squander their strength unwittingly. Of this universal rule, the case of Wright is perhaps the most conspicuous in our political history.

Silas Wright was one of those persons about whom children flock; whom churches ask to occupy their pulpits; to whom men tell their inner secrets and entrust their estates at death; whom conventions ask to preside; to whom the sick cry for comfort; whom legislators put in the United States Senate; to whom college presidents go for advice; in whose offices young men seek to study their profession; whom editors consult constantly; who are asked to speak upon any and all occasions and before any and every kind of gathering; whom the plain people elect to any and every office; and whom for their common and uncommon sense and kindness, their own wives respect and love.

Silas Wright was a free and honest man desiring to see develop upon this continent a free and honest people.

When it must be said candidly of a great man that he was not much like any one else, it becomes apparent that we have a genuine new character revealed. Such was Silas Wright, the migrant Yankee, who retained his good sense and genial social sympathy, retained individual initiative and self-reliance and gained the arts at once of serving and of ruling men.

# A Life of Silas Wright

## A Roll-Call of the Great.

Silas Wright, United States Senator and Governor of New York, was born in 1795 and died in 1847. No more honorable name is known to the rolls of the Senate of the United States and of the State of New York governorship. From both the personal and the public points of view, no more generally satisfactory political career was ever lived in America than his. Silas Wright was at heart the plainest and kindest of men, with ability so great that he never seemed to be trying to succeed. He did things easily, all manner of things, as this record shows. He had ample time, so it always appeared, to do whatever the circumstances required. And he was brave even to daring.

The roll of the National Senate has many illustrious names—both Adamses, Oliver Ellsworth, Rufus King, Jonathan Trumbull (our “Brother Jonathan” of patriotic fame), Andrew Jackson, De Witt Clinton and many, many more, including Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, Thomas Hart Benton, Daniel Webster, and so on all the way to George F. Hoar and Jonathan

P. Dolliver of recent times. Silas Wright was the peer of these men and so recognized in his generation. But he lived too short a life to get his character and opinions fully into the record.

It is the peculiar glory of New York, as indeed "the Empire State," that for all that is unsavory in her politics, she displays a roll of Governors not equalled by any other State, not even by Virginia or by Massachusetts, for high quality of intellect or for purity and courage of character, or for both. There were George and De Witt Clinton, Daniel D. Tompkins (afterwards Vice-President), Martin Van Buren, William L. Marcy, William H. Seward, John A. Dix, Samuel J. Tilden, Alonzo B. Cornell (founder of Cornell University), Grover Cleveland, Levi P. Morton (afterwards Vice-President), and Theodore Roosevelt. Three became President—Van Buren, Cleveland, and Roosevelt. One other was statistically and morally elected but legally and constitutionally counted out—Tilden. And one other would probably have become President but for an untimely death—Silas Wright, the equal of any American statesman. The high achievement of Abraham Lincoln was all in the years of life that Silas Wright never saw, for he died at but fifty-two years of age. Had he survived longer, probably Taylor would never have become President, nor Pierce, nor Buchanan. And probably in 1848 or in 1852 or in 1856 Silas

Wright would have become President. The book of fate opened its pages otherwise for us Americans; and it is unprofitable to speculate upon the "if's" of history.

### The Paternal Lineage of Silas Wright.

Of the remoter ancestry of Silas Wright (whose two names beget confidence), not much beyond names and dates of his paternal lineage in America is known. Samuel Wright adventured probably as a Puritan from England to Boston in 1630, though by some he is accounted a Separatist and Pilgrim. Not many years later he went pioneering to Northampton, where he lived as a farmer and died in 1665.

His son Samuel Wright, junior, was killed by the Indians in Northfield, near the New Hampshire line, September 2, 1675, leaving a son Joseph; when he was born is unknown; he died in 1697. His son Samuel, great-grandson of the English immigrant, had a son Samuel, another junior, who removed from Northampton to Amherst village, then politically a part of the famous and beautiful town of Old Hadley. This Samuel, junior, continued the farming of his ancestral line, but his own son Silas became a tanner, currier, and shoemaker—a worker in leather. He never went to school,

but in later youth learned from fellow-apprentices and journeymen how to read, 'rite, and do 'rithmetic—that is, "cast accounts." He married well, choosing a girl of the neighborhood who had far more than ordinary talents and an unusual education for one of her sex. To them were born nine children, two of whom died in infancy. One of these children was Silas, junior; but apparently he was not the oldest son, despite his name. Tradition reports him as the third child. Silas was born May 24, 1795. In March of the next year father and mother and growing family abandoned their friends and relatives and set out northward for Weybridge, Addison County, Vermont, and gave up the leather trade for the ancestral life upon the farm.

### From the Plain People.

The reënforcement of the so-called "upper classes" by variants from the masses is one of the significant features of human history. Democracy is good because it sets the process free and to an extent even encourages it. The average voter feels inclined to favor just a little the superior man of his own origin as against the superior man who has had every youthful advantage, or alleged advantage. It appears that the variations from the typical condition of farm-workers began in the case of Silas Wright

with his mother strongly and with his father to a degree.

The man who comes from long lines of manual outdoor laborers and of working wives and mothers usually possesses a stable nervous system and a competent set of muscles. He does not inherit overworked brain cells. He has a zest for life and therefore appreciating it, understands it.

It may be that the time will come when there shall be a nation among whom there shall be none undereducated, none whose brains have lain fallow, as it were, for many generations. There has never been any such nation yet; and one may question whether there would then be a supply of men and women of such spontaneity and overflowing vital energy as were displayed, for example, by some great men of the time of Silas Wright. Are not the "plain people" needed as a reservoir, or perhaps better as a perennial fountain whence shall flow a fresh stream of the water of the life of genius and of pure morality?

One who reflects upon the life of this statesman cannot well avoid comment upon the contrast of the record of the rise into wide usefulness and high service of such a man as Wright as compared with the records of typical men of power in the privileged classes of Europe, whose policies had been discarded but half a century earlier. In a way, our Senators are of the rank and influence of British Lords; our Governors

are of the rank and influence of Dukes and Earls. Some of our Senators and Governors have been as rich as Duke and Earl, and some have been as poor as the familiar "impecunious lord" of fiction and of fact. But between the two systems and their products there is a great gulf fixed; and in that great gulf, that bottomless abyss, America has thrown forever many a hindrance to human betterment.

Silas Wright, son of long lines of pioneers, peasants, laborers, may well be cited as an example of the public advantage of the American system of social and political equality.

### The Scenes of Youth.

The village of Weybridge is just northeast of Middlebury upon Otter Creek. Across the hills, ten miles away, is Lake Champlain. It was a late winter trip of a hundred miles northward for the ambitious family. Due west across the Lake fifteen miles is Crown Point, and beyond rise the Adirondacks. To the east, scarcely twenty miles away, runs due north and south the main range of the Green Mountains. Killington Peak and curious Camel's Hump and splendid Mount Mansfield, four thousand feet high, are all within a day's journey of a stout man afoot. Ticonderoga is not quite twenty miles to the southeast. In this glorious land of mountain and valley, beautifully rural to this

day, Silas Wright grew up, like many another youth of the region, to be a scholar, a thinker and a doer of the word.

### Student and Teacher.

The boy was recognized as the genius of the family, and he alone was educated at academy and college. He was given his "freedom" to study and in a small measure financially helped. Completing the district school at fourteen years of age, he was sent to Middlebury Academy in 1809 and in 1811 entered the College from which he was graduated in 1815, at just twenty years of age, in a class of thirty. He was one of the first Vermont Democrats, never a large party. Only three of his classmates shared his views. He got his Democracy with his father, however, who served in the State Legislature from 1800 to 1810, and who with his oldest son fought in "the War of 1812" at the battle of Plattsburgh, September, 1814. Plattsburgh was fifty miles to the north and across the Lake.

Each winter when in college Silas, junior, taught school in Addison and Rutland Counties. Of this school teaching, nothing is heard even by tradition. He was probably as good a teacher in discipline that no one ever talked about him in any way whatever. Evidently, however, he did not care for the work. For his services perhaps he received as much as three

dollars a week and free board in turn in the families of his pupils. All the teachers of the period in Vermont were either college or academy students like himself, or broken-down preachers; if women, very young or very old. Full-grown, strong, and healthy men and women did not teach school; they could earn more money and they did command more respect doing almost anything else.

By temperament, Silas Wright was not born to be a teacher. He loved children always, and they always loved him. But he had no desire to control children or to guide youth. He was judicial rather than talkative; and though in a large way he was foresighted, he preferred to work upon immediate affairs. The good teacher knows that he is investing his time, labor and thoughts, for years and decades ahead, sowing seed that must die before it yields grain to the harvest.

Perhaps half, certainly not many less than half, of the men who have become prominent in American public life have taught schools at least for brief periods. Historians and historical writers usually say that these statesmen felt the call to higher work or to a larger field of usefulness. Wherein law is higher or larger than teaching, no man can say. It is not so accounted in Germany. In the history of the human race it has not generally been so accounted. The elevation in 1913 of a lifelong

teacher to be President of the United States has already done much to correct the peculiar notion of American writers.

As for Silas Wright, he gave up teaching because he did not like it well enough to continue in it, but he never felt that law and politics were a higher or a larger field than education.

One generation needs to set its ablest men to law and politics, another to set them to business, and another to religion as leaders. The generation of Silas Wright needed him in law; and there he served admirably. But democracy dealing directly with human problems knows that there is no higher or lower, no larger or smaller, in such affairs of seriousness as law, medicine, journalism and the other professions.

### A Student of Law in New York State.

Twenty miles southeastward, at the turn of the Hudson westward, is Sandy Hill. There in October, 1815, Wright began to study law with Henry C. Martindale, afterwards for several terms a member of the House of Representatives in Congress. For Silas Wright it was intellectually a most fortunate experience that he was so well started, and equally fortunate that Roger Skinner, another lawyer of the village, afterwards a United States Circuit Judge, took him into his office to complete his bar preparation. He made other friends there also

to help him forward in later years. Thoroughly equipped for practice, in January, 1819, he was admitted to the bar.

Fortunate, indeed, is that young man who makes the right connections early in life. It is a matter seldom within his control. Many a youth of talent and of character is undiscovered, does not early receive the right guidance, fails to get under headway early enough to make a successful voyage of life. Such, however, was not the case with Wright. His early advisers in New York State were competent and powerful men; and they remained his friends until death. Again and again, their influence in his behalf was felt. It was by no means his way to solicit influence, whether that of old friends or of new acquaintances. Nevertheless, one would form a distinctly false impression of the making of the career of Wright unless this gift of his of keeping friends as well as of making them, and this good fortune of being brought into association with men of standing are fully known and recognized.

### In Saint Lawrence County.

But his physical health had been so considerably impaired that his friends set him on horseback to travel with a companion through the westward country to get well. He pro-

ceeded to Lake Ontario, and then keeping north of the Adirondacks, returned eastward alone. He had gone in all some two hundred miles when luck brought him to Canton, in Saint Lawrence County, where he came upon old friends from Weybridge. They offered to build in the wilderness village an office building suitable for a young lawyer; and he accepted. The building had two rooms, in one of which he lodged.

Perhaps the ancient yet ever young god, Cupid, somewhat influenced him, for he soon fell in love with a daughter of his chief benefactor, Captain Medad Moody. Thus began a lifelong comradeship. They did not marry for years and years; but it is an interesting feature of even his political correspondence that whenever he was separated from this domestic lady, who disliked travel even after railroads came in, somewhere in each letter Silas Wright was likely to remark that he was "lonesome." It was not that he liked to talk or to be talked to all the time, though he was sociable enough to enjoy conversation; but that Clarissa Moody became an indispensable part of his world. Without her, he did not feel at home.

Of the personality of this lady, the correspondence still preserved shows much. She was but an occasional letter writer; her letters were brief. But she had a pleasant manner of speech and of expression; and was solicitous of the welfare of her husband, being entirely content

with her lot in life. Other than to be helpful and agreeable, and to be allowed to stay quietly at home, she seems to have had no especial desires. Though by no means given to public affairs, she seems to have understood the true worth of her husband and to have been his chief admirer, a very good quality in a wife.

To be well-born and to be well-married—these are the two incomparable blessings. Each came to Silas Wright. Comparisons of the domestic households of statesmen are becoming far more common now than they used to be upon the severe pages of history. Few men not well-married make great successes in life. Whatever be the unhappy feature of their lives in this respect, its unfortunate effect is obvious. Silas Wright had an accomplished and cheerful help-meet as his most valuable asset.

### The Scenes of His Mature Life.

Canton is upon the Grass River, ten miles east of Black Lake, not quite twenty miles south of the Saint Lawrence. Half a hundred miles southeast are the finest features of the upper Adirondack region,—among them Sugar Loaf Mountain and Saranac Lake. Even Mount Marcy is but sixty miles away. The climate is dry, the air is bracing. The summer, though hot enough in the Saint Lawrence Valley, is short;

the winter is long and exhilarating. The entire region is a natural health resort.

The soil of the valleys and of some of the uplands is fertile enough; but the range of crops is small.

In this beautiful scene Silas Wright would settle down to enjoy himself and to work out the problems of life.

While the office building was progressing, young Silas had ridden away horseback home; but he soon returned with his older brother Samuel for company on the way. Samuel had loaned him a wagon and horse for the journey. The wagon carried some household furniture and goods donated by a fond mother to her brightest son.

### Surrogate.

The next year, 1820, Governor De Witt Clinton, Anti-federalist, appointed Wright surrogate of the county. It was a noteworthy tribute to his winning and friendly qualities. Probably that brilliant politician hoped thereby to win a rising lawyer to his party.

Silas Wright was now twenty-five years of age, of good height, well-built, of sturdy, yeoman carriage. Blue-eyed, sandy-haired, he was a typical Saxon. Lips thin and compressed, nose large but finely modeled, ears large but set close to his head, the man already was recog-

nized as born to control because first of all able to control himself.

### The Clintons.

For half a century George and De Witt Clinton, uncle and nephew, made a large part of the history of New York State and a considerable part of the history of the country. The former was the first Governor of the State, being elected in 1777. Of course, the Loyalists had not been allowed to take part in the very limited elections that were held, for in truth New York was pro-British. During the Revolutionary War, George Clinton as general of militia saw much hard fighting and became a military hero in the public eye. Continuing as Governor until 1795, and serving again from 1801 to 1804, he projected the policies whence have come the canals and many other features of New York State development. For eight years from 1804 he was Vice-President of the United States. It was by his casting vote in the Senate that in 1811 the first Bank of the United States lost the renewal of its charter, for he was a strong State's rights man. It was one of his daughters whom Citizen Genet from France married.

The Clintons were a numerous family as well as politically powerful and commercially rich. They constituted a great force in New York

State, a force with which Silas Wright must reckon.

De Witt Clinton was the favorite nephew of George and was for a considerable time his private secretary. By 1800, though but thirty-one years old, he had become the acknowledged Democratic leader of the State, which two years later sent him to the United States Senate. In the periods 1817-1822 and 1824-1828 he was Governor of New York.

This brilliant statesman has many successes to his credit—the Erie Canal completed in 1826, and development of schools, among them.

The Clintons, however, had ways with them that hardly win favor in our more sensitive times. They rode down opposition in true aristocratic fashion. They drove forward like rulers—like kings, in a way, kings by public acquiescence.

De Witt Clinton lost a leg in 1818, and his health never recovered. He died suddenly in 1828. But for the fact that New York was still less powerful in the nation than Pennsylvania, Virginia and Massachusetts and for this accident, this most brilliant member of a remarkable family would probably have attained the Presidency itself.

His death left Martin Van Buren master of the Albany Regency and of the politics of New York State.

## Early Recipient of Many Military and Political Honors and Offices.

Next year, honors and duties came fast. Wright was soon postmaster as well as justice of the peace and commissioner of deeds and surrogate. The pioneers recognized this man as a true type of civilization. In the same year, they made him town clerk and inspector of the common schools. Incidentally as it were, he became official roadmaker or "pathmaster" for his neighborhood.

New England town-meeting towns always have plenty of offices to allot to the various citizens—"free inhabitants" or "electors," as they usually are styled. But they do not often give so many offices to one man, and then ask a State Governor and the United States Post Office head to appoint the man to yet other offices.

## Brigadier-General; State Senator; Congressman.

Not only so; but in 1822 they must have a company of militia, and Silas Wright shall be captain. In this service he rose fast. Before the year was out he became major, in 1826 colonel, and in 1827 brigadier-general for upper New York State, an office that he held until 1829.

The military record of Wright was one of which he thought least; but it seems to have had a considerable influence upon his character and career. The drill and drill left their mark upon his carriage and demeanor, and the friendships formed with officers and privates were never forgotten.

Some there are who dream that before long there will come final peace to the world. Then arms and soldiers and battle will be no more. Such an idea was never entertained seriously by Silas Wright, and indeed has never been entertained generally by men who understand human nature. Wright hated war and always opposed anything and everything that looked toward war, including the threatened war with France in the time of Tyler and the war with Mexico into which Calhoun forced Polk. But he never supposed that warfare would cease.

The blood lust is an inheritance of the sons of men, an instinct to be reckoned with; a fact as real as hunger and cold. It must have uses in the mind of God.

Wright believed in training militia to fight and to get wars done with quickly.

It seems that he did every kind of work well, or at least sufficiently well to please every one.

And only part has been told.

In 1823 his neighbors sent Silas to the State Legislature as Senator and kept him there until 1827, when they sent him to the House of Rep-

resentatives in Congress at Washington, where he served a term while John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, whom he greatly admired, was still President.

The vigor and aloofness of the Massachusetts Yankee President, his absolute devotion to what he regarded as the public good and his own duty, appealed to the Congressman who still agreed with him upon the tariff, including the "tariff of abominations" in 1828, but whom he opposed in respect to internal improvements and to appointments to office.

So high was the state of popular favor for Silas Wright that it is said that no member of his military household, whether officer or private, ever voted for a political opponent in all this period.

Yet Silas Wright, even in the month that he left the House of Representatives, was still but thirty-three years old. It does not appear that he had been a precocious child; but it does appear that he came early to full maturity.

### Stories of Early Days.

Some anecdotes of this period from 1820 to 1829 may serve to illustrate this record of his character and of his conduct.

There is the usual fisticuffs story. It appears that in his western trip in 1819 Wright was

accompanied part of the way by another youth. They stopped at a little tavern in the backwoods and after supper found themselves surrounded by a group of men, mostly young like themselves, who taunted "the young sprigs of the law" for their fine clothes and for their elegant speech. Wright and his friend promptly challenged one after another of the country bloods to fight with fists and whipped every one of them. This throws some light upon the extent of the impairment of the muscles of Silas and upon the nature of his ill-health, which was but temporary exhaustion from overstudy. Possibly his school-teaching experiences had taught him how to whip opponents, for those were rough days, and many a teacher had to lay aside his rod and coat and fight some big recalcitrant pupil barehanded to a finish. Or he may have learned to fight at academy and college for pastime before the era of football.

Though magistrate and surrogate, Wright did not hesitate to practice law; but he seldom took a case into court. He became famous for advising would-be litigants to keep out of court, and even as magistrate often persuaded both parties to come to terms amicably. Usually he took no fees for his advice; and when he made any charges made them low.

If any fell sick, Wright was the first of the neighbors, winter or summer, to go to the rescue, almost always walking afoot, though he had to

cover many miles. He was man-nurse and lay-physician for all the countryside.

In 1827, when first elected to Congress, he got together one day in November all his memoranda of bills due—not one of them being over \$5—and taking the total—some \$600—he opened the stove door and shoved them into the fire, remarking: “Those men have all done more for me than I ever have done or can do for them. Let’s forget it, and start anew.”

Thereafter he carried on almost no law practice, devoting his time to the study of problems of statesmanship and to conference and to consultation with others. He was a faithful and laborious committee worker.

Silas Wright never cared to get rich. He had almost no wants. He did not yet own a farm, as did nearly every one else; but in a way he farmed the Moody place, being one of those persons who are always busy yet have plenty of time for something more. Perhaps a very competent adviser explains in part the ease with which he went through all the affairs of life.

### The Democratic Movement.

Earlier than this, in 1823, Wright had taken ground in favor of the election of the Presidential electors by the people rather than by the State Legislature. This was part and parcel of the Democratic movement for manhood suffrage

that was to culminate in 1829 in the election of General Andrew Jackson to the Presidency. In this year, 1823, Wright was elected to the State Senate by the most northern district, comprising nine large but thinly settled counties, as an anti-Clintonian, at a time when De Witt Clinton was the great man of the State, elected because every one liked him.

Through all these years, besides all his other offices, he found time, as has been noted above, to be local "pathmaster," and in his road-making he worked himself, being an expert ox-team driver and ploughman. This contributed markedly to his fame and popularity.

We, who in the twentieth century, read and write of the Honorable Silas Wright, one-time United States Senator and New York State Governor, need constantly to remember that to northern New York State, the whole Adirondack country, he was, first of all, "Farmer" Wright and, second, "the country lawyer." Yet as the record shows, though essentially the provincial in his affections and in his manners, he was far more than the provincial in his mind.

### Always at Work.

Silas Wright had the rare fortune to be born with great abilities and yet to grow up with perfect unself-consciousness. He never thought well of himself; he simply went and did the next

thing. Like the Buddhist of India, in his creed was this principle: "Whoever needs me commands me." There was no one event of self-sacrifice; he was too strong a man and in a measure throughout life too fortunate a man ever to sacrifice himself; and yet though he came of a long-lived race, he died untimely of weakness through overwork. The whole of his strength had been paid out. He could not rest or in any real sense "loaf" and restore his strength.

### Other Anecdotes of Early Days.

In October of the year 1828 the 7th Rifle Regiment was called to general review for a week. The last day it is recorded that in the morning "the rain and hail fell in torrents, and the wind blew a hurricane." Every company but one took to the tents. But General Wright and his staff rode over the field and saluted that one company—the old company that he had organized years before as captain. Baring his head, he cried out: "That's right, boys. That's the kind of soldiers I like. I knew that I should have one company to review even if it rained pitchforks, unless they came tines downward."

The storm cleared away. In the bright afternoon sunshine the regiment was reviewed complete. And the General remarked with his usual

smile, as he looked upon the lines: "Those fellows got about as wet after all as I did."

But for all his high offices in the militia, he never liked to be called "general" and for all his high offices in civil life, he always delighted in being known as "Mr. Wright" or just plain "Wright." There was no uncouthness about him; he felt, however, that to be a genuine man is greater than to be a general or a governor.

Once in this early period he had an ugly case to try in court, a civil action between two scoundrels. In his final pleading he told the truth about each party to the suit; and he won. As they left the court, his client said: "I didn't hire you to rake my character, and I don't thank you for doing it."

"You hired me to defend yourself and win," replied Wright, "and if I had palliated your side in the least, you would have lost. And, let me add, I hope you will so improve your conduct that you will never again be subjected to the same embarrassment."

It is not surprising to learn that when the Presbyterian Church of Canton had no settled pastor, Silas Wright went into the pulpit weekly and read the printed sermon of some noted divine. Or that a stranger happening into town was accosted at once by some little boys who asked him: "Please tell us when Mr. Wright will get back." The village children were his playmates in his road-making and farming and

even about his office when he was at home. Even at thirty years of age he was in a way a patriarch.

Perhaps as interesting a story as any is this, though it relates to a much later period: While he was Senator, General Macomb from the distant South came to Canton in 1838 and went to the home of the Wrights.

Of a workman on the place he asked for Mr. Wright. The workman pointed to a man working in a mortar-bed.

"But," said the stranger, "I mean the Honorable Silas Wright."

"Well, that's him."

"You don't understand. I mean Senator Wright."

"Well, that's Senator Wright."

And so it was.

Silas Wright seldom drove in a carriage and never owned such a vehicle. It was a joke with him that he liked his "wheelbarrow better than any coach."

### "No Pledges or Promises."

In one of his earliest letters as preserved in the invaluable manuscript collection at the New York Public Library, written at Canton, and addressed to Hon. A. C. Flagg at Plattsburg, an editorial "republican" friend, he wrote: "This much I dare to say, that if ever I was

elected to any popular office, it will not be by strength of pledges on my part; and when any body of men, assuming the right to nominate or elect, wish to use my name, they must do so from the confidence they place in my ability and integrity and not from tying me up with pledges and promises which the same principles that would allow me to make would permit me to break."

This Azariah C. Flagg to whom Wright sent so many letters and such long ones, and who was a great influence in his life, was a serious-minded man about five years his senior. By trade Flagg was a printer, but during the "War of 1812" he became a newspaper publisher and editor. He held many public offices by appointment, including those of Comptroller of New York State and also of New York City. His fame rests chiefly upon exceptional skill in financial matters. As a politician, he was quiet and shrewd. He opposed the Bank of the United States, favored the Erie Canal, and opposed the extension of slavery.

But though he was so closely sympathetic with the views and sentiments of Silas Wright, he lacked the supreme gifts of the latter, as he himself well knew and cheerfully recognized.

Next month, writing again to Flagg, after his election, he said: "The support of Clinton County has been rendered against a candidate of their own and with an entire want of ac-

quaintance with myself and mainly from their confidence that I am republican and that the opposite candidate is federal, without asking pledges or promises as a condition of that support. This was republican, and I shall not forget it. This elevation of myself to the office of Senator, you may rest assured, Sir, is premature; but it is too late for me to back out. Want of experience and of proper qualifications will be conspicuous, but want of proper democratic principles will not be felt."

He was indeed inexperienced; but he was able and willing to learn. Within a year the tone of his letters changes; and we read of "rascals" to be punished by "finding a God in Israel."

### "Put Friends Into Office."

From Canton, August 29, 1827, he wrote to Flagg, who had become Secretary of State: "On the subject of these appointments, you know well my mind. Give them to good, true and useful friends, who will enjoy the emolument, if there is any, and who will use the influence to our benefit. This is the long and short of the rule by which to act, and as you say, when our enemies accuse [us] of putting our friends [into office] instead of them [selves], never let them lie in telling the story."

Without exactly this spirit, Federalist aristocracy and bureaucracy might never have

ended. To change the ideas and manners of government, change the men. Government is not the private property of officeholders.

In his correspondence, Wright was full of the spirit of fun and talked about meeting his friends soon again at their Albany home "to kick up a row." He speaks frankly out of an ingenuous heart: "Politically, I have little to say; I am too mad to write sense upon that subject." And in his very next letter he sends an introduction for two young gentlemen who have been students of law in his office. He seems to have had time for all things. But he adds honestly and humorously that their success upon examination for the bar will be more probable if they are questioned upon democratic principles and politics than if they are questioned upon law.

Democracy was not a mere word then; it meant a social change from class and in a way caste to equality. It was the watchword of fighting reformers.

Democracy was opposed to aristocracy, which meant the inheritance of political and social privileges. It was opposed also to bureaucracy, which meant government by clerks and officers upon tenure for life and, therefore, red tape, favoritism, incompetence, and many other familiar ills and evils.

In 1827 democracy meant about what in 1811 progressiveism meant. We who have been wit-

nessing the change from progressiveism to Progressiveism, a change from a social movement to a political party, would do well to study the record of the change from democracy in 1827 to the Democracy of 1844.

As a democrat, Silas Wright saw the change of individuals as a necessity. It does not, however, follow by any manner of means that in 1913 we should abandon our civil service principles and undertake rotation in office. The *social mili  * is different. Our society is essentially democratic.

### His Political Letters.

December 13, 1827, Wright, now become Representative, declares in a letter to Flagg: "Another administration is overturned, Mr. Speaker Taylor is destroyed, the great commercial State of New York is abandoned by her own representation and treachery and treason rule. This is what I delight in. I like to see the galled jade wince."

### Parochial, Not National.

But seven days later he writes in a fine hand to Flagg a wonderful letter of some sixteen large pages, in which he sets forth fully his political ideas and plans. The general notion is, so he says, "Save the State, and let the nation save itself. \* \* \* Even M. V. B. [Martin

Van Buren] would rather jeopardize the Presidential election itself than to risk a breaking up of our ranks at home." He complains bitterly of President J. Q. Adams and Secretary of State Daniel Webster. "All say party is done away with, but come to selections for office, Federalists are never forgotten; and we should suppose that in the doing away of party, the old line of Democrats was done away with by annihilation." He compares the President with General Jackson and says: "Either from choice or mere accident, Old Hero keeps better company and relies upon better men for support. \* \* \* Again, Mr Adams holds to the most extended construction of the Constitution in relation to the powers of the General Government, and to the most limited construction of the powers of the States."

Silas Wright was a wit and at the end of this December letter says that he expects Flagg to have read it by April when the State Legislature adjourns. "Should you wish it, you may let the Comptroller read a few pages as he may get time in the course of the winter."

### On the Tariff.

But a month later he writes another letter and a long one, in which he analyzes mathematically the tariff question. He adds: "The mere interests of a few men who have got into bad

business, owe debts which they cannot pay, and who now with their creditors want Uncle Sam to help them out" seem only to be considered and not "conscience or reason."

The true character of the man is revealed in a sentence in a letter of February 6, 1828, from Washington: "It is not my habit to withhold my thoughts from my friends, or I could not keep my good feeling toward them."

It was the great year of the passing of the "tariff of abominations," and the "temperature" of Silas Wright, so he says, is "high." He calls the battle one "between the Farmers and the Manufacturers."

In the debate upon this measure in the House of Representatives in April, 1828, Wright said: "I had supposed that when I put the American manufacturer upon a par with the foreigner (by duties), and not only so, but left against the foreigner the whole of the expense and charges of bringing his goods to our markets, I had granted a fair protection to our manufacturer, but not that I had thereby granted to him a monopoly. \* \* \* I have never inquired into the degrees of blood of sheep or of men. \* \* \* None of my ambition is drawn from considerations of blood, and it therefore never has been any part of my business to trace the blood of beasts or men. It never shall be any part of my business until that system of monopoly is established in this country which some ardently

wish and so many loudly and boldly call for. When that time shall arrive, their blood may rate them among the monopolists. Then, too, the degrees of blood of my kindred, of my friends, may determine whether they are to labor in the factories or be ranked among the monopolists."

The "tariff of abominations" appears to have averaged forty-one per cent.

In 1828 Wright hurried from Washington to Canton to work for the nomination and election of Jackson.

It was a time of great political commotion. Anti-Masonry, stirred by the alleged abduction and killing of William Morgan, who had given out its secrets, was at its height. De Witt Clinton had died, and Martin Van Buren had succeeded to the leadership. Wright himself barely won his reëlection; indeed, it was disputed for some months.

In December he wrote again from Washington; and this picture is worth seeing: "The South Carolina and Georgia members have come on clad in their homespuns, a kind of coarse sattenette. This I like. If their revenge for the tariff is to be thus manifested, they will completely get the better of us sticklers, as this is truly practical tariffism."

## Too Poor for High Office.

Several letters passed between these two good friends respecting a nomination as Senator. December 19, 1828, the Congressman writes: "I do not want the office. The elevation is too great for my years connected with my poverty. The responsibilities are too fearful for my experience upon this great political theater."

There was doubtless entire truth in this statement about his financial affairs. The salary of members of Congress was but thirty-five hundred dollars, and in this period party candidates had no political funds from which to draw for expenses in campaigning. And there was entire candor in this statement about the Senate. Great as is the distance between Senate and House now, it was far greater before the Inter-State War. Then Senators considered themselves in a conference between sovereign States federated but by no means nationalized. Representatives were merely popular delegates; Senators were ambassadors.

## Appointed Comptroller of New York State.

In February, 1829, came the solution of his personal difficulties, for he was appointed Comptroller of the State of New York; and so ended

the first political period in the life of Silas Wright.

This wonderfully interesting correspondence with Flagg shows several things that must be known before Wright himself and his later career can be understood.

In the first respect—and in a way it is but a trivial item—his handwriting greatly changed, indicating a very great change in his power of forth putting. He always wrote freely *currente calamo*. Not seldom, in his hurry, he omitted words. He was an accurate speller, and his handwriting was notably uniform. But there is a change in the size of his chirography, which grows far larger, and in the quantity of ink, which is more abundantly spent each year. He had been carefully feeling his way as his powers grew.

It is not trivial that he began at Albany with principles and soon came to be personal and partisan, and that in Washington he was much mixed between a sense of principles and a sense of party needs. He was going to school to the world. And though he was an apt and sure, he was not a quick learner.

Nor is it trivial that he himself saw and said that "we are all New Englanders and Yankees" at Canton and that in Washington he was a genuine New Yorker, no longer an Adams' worshipper because Adams was from near Boston.

## "The Infamous Seventeen Senators"

Silas Wright got into New York State and Washington national politics in sorry times of personal factionalism. He was enmeshed in circumstance. Even generous admirers cannot wholly approve his course in the matter of the "infamous seventeen Senators" at Albany in 1824. Wright had been elected because he favored the popular election of Presidential electors; and yet upon March 10th, after long debates, he was one of seventeen who voted to postpone indefinitely the further consideration of the matter. Why? Because there had been a deadlock between several plans for such election, including one for a general State ticket and a majority of votes, another for choice of individual electors by districts, and a third for a general ticket with a plurality of votes.

Public opinion was greatly against the "seventeen Senators," and yet several of them were later elected to higher office. They had done the immediately practical thing and trusted to time for vindication.

## The Political Situation in the Country at Large.

Nor is it easy to understand the tortuous course of Wright respecting the Presidential aspirations of William H. Crawford of Georgia,

whom he had openly favored in the canvass-for-election period. Finally the Presidential election of 1824-1825 was effected in the House of Representatives, where New York State, for all her size and population, counted for no more than Rhode Island and Delaware.

But it is easy to understand why his course in these and indeed other matters is not wholly approvable. He spoke truthfully when he confessed his inexperience. These were the years of his schooling for larger affairs. Without them, his total accomplishment would have been far less.

The whole country was indeed shaping itself for manhood suffrage and for universal male democracy. The country itself was going to school. It took to itself a strange teacher, Andrew Jackson, the untaught man of blood and of temper, rejecting John Quincy Adams, the man of culture and of outward self-control.

By thrusting Adams ignominiously out of the Presidency, the nation made it possible for a Massachusetts district to send the old man to Congress, where he became the fiery apostle of the democratic right of petition. There he fought year by year two great fights, one wrong for a protective tariff, even a prohibitive tariff; and the other right, and the second was a thousand times more important to the welfare of a people than the first. Nations have long survived wicked statutes dealing with their mate-

rial or economic affairs; but no nation has ever long survived nor can ever survive long when the citizens have not free access to the ear and mind of the sovereign.

Liberty is far more necessary than prosperity.  
Jackson as President and J. Q. Adams as Representative each stood for liberty.

### Canton, the County Seat.

It was in this period of his tutelage by the world before he himself became in a true sense the guide and master of others that there occurred an incident finely illustrative of the fundamental character of the truly remarkable qualities of Silas Wright.

The State Legislature had passed an Act directing that the county seat of Saint Lawrence County should be transferred to a more central point for the convenience of the citizens than Ogdensburg. There was at once a prompt challenge that Canton had no suitable building stone for the county buildings. In the New England style, Silas Wright called a meeting of the citizens of Canton and said as he closed: "I will go to the stone quarry to-morrow morning with a spade, shovel, crowbar and pickax; who will go with me?"

The citizens cried out: "We will all go."  
Next morning Silas went. That very day they quarried and transported to Canton, six

miles away, twenty wagon loads of stone. Next day they moved eighty loads. The third day, one hundred and twenty loads. Silas Wright worked at that job twenty-one week days successively; and declined so much as a dollar of pay from the building commissioner. He refused to look upon government public work as the citizen's opportunity to get money.

### "The Albany Regency."

In these early days of his experience in State and national politics, New York was divided politically, not only into Federalists and Republican-Democrats, but also into "Buck Tails" (as Silas Wright in his letters always wrote the name), and the rest, often called the Clintonians, later to be known as "Hunkers." Thoroughly to present this, in a measure now obscure, subject would be tedious and probably profitless. But the gist of the matter is that on the whole in 1816 the Tammany Society of New York city were Madisonians and therefore anti-Clintonians. Some of the members wore in their caps deer's tails, and hence were called "bucktails." These Buck Tails found their climax in the famous "Albany Regency," to which Silas Wright, who was a Bucktail, often referred in his correspondence.

The Albany Regency had their headquarters at the Capital of New York State and for a

considerable time Martin Van Buren was their leader. At the beginning of their power, they tried to make William H. Crawford President as against John Quincy Adams in 1824. Eventually by 1846, as the record shows, the struggle between the Bucktails and the Clintonians changed into one between the Barnburners and the Hunkers. The barnburning simile refers to the man who burned his barn to the ground in order to get rid of the rats. The Barnburners were radicals; they gathered to themselves the anti-renters, or those who were opposed to the seigniorial rights of the Hudson river valley land-owning patroons. The Hunkers were the conservatives or "standpat" successors of the aristocratic Federalists. Bucktails of 1816, Barnburners of 1842, Liberty party men of 1846, Freesoilers of 1848, Republicans of 1856, constitute one historical sequence —radical. But anyone who attempts to work out the historical sequence of the conservatives soon finds himself in a maze of inexplicable confusion and of inextricable difficulty.

From this brief summary it appears that we do not get all the inner struggle of political history by following national party names.

This was indeed an era of what appear to us now as decentralized conditions. North and South alike, the States counted higher than the Nation. Throughout his entire life, even while Silas Wright was a practical but not a theoret-

ical protectionist, he was in all his affiliations in politics a defender of State's rights, a parochial or localist or decentralizationist.

Upon first thought, it might appear that two years at Washington, with a reëlection narrowly won and only with legal difficulty secured, would have made Silas Wright a master of national politics. But, in truth, a two years' experience in Washington, even in the days when the population of the United States was under thirteen millions in number, could not make a man familiar with American politics. The young man who wins in national politics does so from luck or favor, not by superior knowledge and seldom by merit. Silas Wright knew that so far he had been in only a primary school of politics.

### The Office of Comptroller.

In 1829 he became comptroller; and now life opened before him clearly and largely. In the State of New York, this office has always had many powers and a wide range of opportunities for acquaintance and friendship and consequent information. In this office, Wright sloughed off his hitherto oversensitiveness to persons and became a man of ideas and of principles. In it, he remained for years. He was but thirty-three years old upon assuming the office; yet it was generally still characteristically the era of young men. The average age of the Fathers of

the Constitution of the United States was but thirty-seven.

The statesman should not think too much of persons. Ideas construct, destroy and reconstruct the world. In the terms of universal history, the mission of the individual is to generate or transmit ideas.

### The Canal Situation.

The Comptroller of New York is next in power to the Governor. At this period, the State had many great new enterprises upon its hands; and so far as they were financial, they came within the authority and control of the Comptroller. The Lake Erie and Lake Champlain canals had just been completed, and lateral branches were being undertaken or at least urged,—the Black River, the Chenango, the Crooked Lake, the Chemung, and the Genesee included. The New York State Comptroller was a member of the canal board. He was facing an annual deficit of \$75,000 and new expenses involving several millions of dollars. The question at once arose of resuming the direct State tax of one mill in the dollar. The underlying question involved a principle, which was whether or not first to let the original canals extinguish the debt incurred by their construction or to proceed with the other canals until the system was complete, leaving posterity to pay off principal and interest.

As a general proposition, Wright favored direct taxation because the people had to see it. He always favored the policy,—pay as you go. He was open, direct, practical and immediate in principle as in manners.

In a famous report, Silas Wright laid down these propositions, viz.:

1st. The route of any proposed canal should be feasible and the water supply secure and ample.

2nd. The cost should be within the means of the State.

3rd. The canal should fill an economic need and soon reimburse the State for all costs.

In a general way, his report was pessimistic. It was certainly democratic in that he refused to believe that government is omnipotent. He was answered by a brilliant and eloquent committee report of the New York State Senate; and the Legislature prevailed against the State financial officer, its Secretary of the Treasury. Neither pessimist nor optimist proved correct. The canals earned far more than the comptroller estimated and about as much less than the Legislature anticipated.

### United States Senator from New York.

Comptroller Wright proved to be “a watch-dog of the treasury.” During the four years of

his service, he so generally pleased the leading men of the State that early in 1833, by a large majority, the Legislature chose him to succeed United States Senator William L. Marcy who had been elected Governor in the fall of 1832. Seldom in the annals of New York State has any man ever been chosen Senator with so little opposition.

The common man, hitherto shut out from the franchise and from public office, felt that the victory of his party meant social equality and personal freedom. Democracy was a missionary movement, a social regeneration, an uplift. Any who suppose that even Marcy meant by his saying what would be meant now, were it used for the first time, simply does not understand that the two political parties then represented two different social classes. Today, all parties are upon one plane.

### No Permanent Bondholders.

In this period, the total State debt of New York was about seven and a half million dollars; and Wright had opposed any increase for canals or anything else that would not surely pay the interest and a sufficient profit to retire the original cost of each undertaking within fifteen years. He resented the idea of building-up a permanent bondholding class, living generation after generation upon the labor of others

through interest collected as taxes. He represented also the idea of binding the obligations of the fathers upon the children's children.

Democracy was getting rid of social classes based upon birth. Wright did not wish to establish classes based upon wealth.

He argued that public undertakings should be based upon means, not upon credit, and should be chargeable to known incomes and not to the general cost. He was in a term an anti-socialist, an individualist.

New York was not yet, by far, the strongest State in the Union. She ranked scarcely upon even terms with Pennsylvania, Virginia and Massachusetts. Today, New York State, which owed nothing from 1893 to 1900, now owes one hundred six millions, and Massachusetts owes ninety millions. Both these States, with nearly all others, are plunging into new vast debts compared with which the amounts that worried Wright were trivial, even when due allowance is made for the differences in population and in the purchasing power of money.

### The Opinion of De Tocqueville.

In 1840, Alexis de Tocqueville of France published his famous book. The social conditions that he saw in America and recorded so acutely were the results of this democratic struggle for a century. Said he: "No profession exists in

which men do not work for money, and this common remuneration gives to them all an air of resemblance. In America, no one is degraded because he works, for every one about him works also; nor is any one humiliated by the notion of receiving pay, for the President of the United States also works for pay. He is paid for issuing orders; other men, for obeying orders. In the United States professions are more or less laborious, more or less profitable; but they are never either high or low: every honest calling is honorable."

The revolution was an accomplished fact; in its final shaping Silas Wright bore a part.

### Marriage, Sept. 11, 1833.

Eight months after becoming United States Senator, Silas Wright, now thirty-seven years of age, married Clarissa Moody, in whose parents' home he had boarded when at Canton ever since his arrival there in 1819. Between them there had been a fourteen years' friendship, and that friendship, scarcely changed in quality even by marriage, continued to be the subject of the admiring conversation of all their neighbors and friends throughout the rest of the life of the statesman. The two were comrades. No children ever came to them; it was their one and only unhappiness.

In an age when nearly all men had large

families, the childless lot of Wright was doubtless a point of sympathy between Jackson and himself. Clay had eight children; Benton had a daughter, Jessie, almost as able as her brilliant husband, John C. Fremont.

Hitherto, Wright had been known as a farmer because of his great interest in the Moody farm. As a bachelor he had recently bought twenty acres of land; but now upon marriage, though setting out again for Washington, he acquired one hundred acres more, nearly all rough land, which he felt sure that he would enjoy clearing up and getting ready for tillage. His wife, who was genuinely domestic, also delighted in the prospect of establishing a home-farm of their own.

These personal items display much of the character of Silas Wright. He would not marry until he could make a home and support a wife properly. But he was entirely faithful to his first and only love. Full of fun and enjoying the companionship of men, in an age not so careful as ours, all the records, whether of his own correspondence or that of those who knew him, and all the traditions show that Silas Wright had none of the vices and few of the foibles of the men of the times. He kept his escutcheon white. Upon investigation, even the stories of occasional hard-drinking are discovered to be false. During most of his life, his friends reported Wright as "an obstinate teetotaler."

## Supreme Court, Senate and House of Representatives Compared.

The vast Capitol at Washington shelters the Supreme Court, the Senate and the House of Representatives, three official bodies whose modes of conduct, and of business, tempers of mind and traditions constitute them worlds apart from one another. In a sense, the membership of each constitutes it a social club with characteristic manners and ideals. The Supreme Court is isolated in the severe solemnity of august patriarchs, each absolutely sure of himself. The House has always had an air of good fellowship, of physical activity and mental alertness.

The Senate stands between these two bodies but nearer the Supreme Court than the House of Representatives in mood. In the year 1833, when Silas Wright entered this legislative chamber as a member, Senators still regarded themselves as the ambassadors of sovereign States in a confederated Union. He had been a member of the House just long enough, two years, to understand its mood and not long enough to become too much habituated to its free and democratic ways. And he had left it long enough ago, four years, to think the situation at the Capitol over and yet not so long as to forget essential matters. Moreover, he was so young as for that very fact to be notable.

## Personal Appearance as Senator.

In person, Senator Wright was a solid up-standing man, now slightly corpulent; and in manner, quiet and in a sense modest, though by no means timid. He had every quality for a great success save one; his voice was harsh. But it was a Senate affording apparently no opportunity for a new man to make any career. It was the Senate of the Twenty-second Congress, often accounted the ablest in our legislative history, for Webster, Clay, Calhoun and Benton were there, as well as lesser men still famous for eloquence and mastery, among them Preston and Rives.

## As Committee Worker and Correspondent.

The success of Wright was largely due to his untiring industry in committee work. In this respect, he reminds one of Samuel Adams, the "master of Boston town meeting." He was also an inveterate letter-writer. As a faithful correspondent, he reminds one of the late Senator Platt of New York. Any one who wrote to him was sure of a reply. He kept himself in the closest touch with his constituency and entire acquaintance. He did this in a sincere spirit of good will to all men.

## Jackson and Wright.

"Old Hero" had just been reëlected President; and he was setting out even more terribly than ever to hunt down his enemies. Parties were just beginning to form again; and they formed mainly upon the line of his personality. Frail with the consumption from which he was to die at "The Hermitage," agitated with the inward wrath that shook him whenever the frequent image of his dead wife crossed his mind, "Old Hickory" never prosecuted any man-hunt more relentlessly than that of Nicholas Biddle, president of the United States Bank with its eighty millions of capital and deposits. This was his aggressive warfare. To trail and kill the Bank was his errand upon the warpath.

The nullification matter was of the opposite kind, a defensive warfare.

The place and work of Silas Wright, for eleven years United States Senator, can be understood only when Andrew Jackson is understood, for it befell the New Yorker to become his spokesman in the Senate, in part, because he was his chosen confidant at the White House.

Andrew Jackson was the most personal and sensitive of men,—like many another natural soldier. He had risen from nothing and nowhere, and he meant to keep the path open for talent. He hated any assumption of superiority by anyone over anyone else. He had brought

in the new day of American democracy when it was no longer a disgrace to be publicly addressed by accepted socially inferior men. He had been a leveller.

Jackson held life cheap and honor dear. He was a born duellist and feudist.

But he was far more than a fighting man. In the soul of the born hunter of men was a fierce aspiration for justice through equality of opportunity. His intellectual quality was keen enough to let him see the fallacies in paper money and unlimited credits, than which no wrongs can be greater to the poor. He desired sound money and honest business. And whatever Andrew Jackson desired, he would work and fight and scheme to get. His desires and ideals obessed and enslaved him.

Notwithstanding this, and, in a sense, contradictory to it, Jackson had a profound respect for law as such, especially law as applied to others.

He had the valuable faculty of discerning and of using men. He was seldom deceived in men or misled by them. Of course, sometimes they used him to their own ends, but only incidentally. Let us find what personal fault we may with him, nevertheless, in his achievements both as General and as President, the cool verdict of history is that he was almost uniformly right. Few Americans would dis-

put the place of Andrew Jackson as at least fourth in rank of Presidents.

He was the hero incarnate of the democratic movement. He was the common man set free to vote and hold office and thereby to rule with the general consent of the governed.

Such was the man who soon took Silas Wright to his heart and for whom the Senator worked diligently and, despite marvellous adversaries, successfully.

At first thought it may seem indeed strange that two men, temperamentally so different, should be good friends; but they had qualities in common,—sincerity and honesty and faith in men, courage and industry and zeal. Wright was a generation younger and looked upon Jackson personally with veneration and love.

### Biddle and the Bank of the United States.

First of their adversaries, there was Nicholas Biddle himself. He had been by election a member of the Pennsylvania Legislature following service as secretary to Armstrong and Monroe as ministers to France. He was an excellent writer and a pleasant speaker. He had in truth all the fascinations of a man of the world. Often his personality has been said closely to resemble that of Lord Byron. Already the Biddles were established as of the

sacred circle of the Philadelphia-elect. When the war began with Andrew Jackson, the head of the great bank was still under fifty, being half a generation younger than the war hero.

For the fourth decade of the nineteenth century in America, it was indeed a great bank. Its assets were nearly eighty millions of dollars, while its liabilities were not quite thirty-eight millions. There was a clear surplus of over forty millions. The bank had a hundred branches, correspondents and depositories. One-third of the members of Congress owned stock in it. It was the official bank of the Nation. No twenty banks in America to-day combined would equal it in relative power.

Such was the institution and such the man that Andrew Jackson of his own motion set out to destroy, and did destroy. Within ten years Nicholas Biddle had died disgraced and insolvent.

The objections of the President to the bank were many.

First, it was a monopoly.

Second, it was a great credit factory.

Third, it was perfectly corrupt both in business and in politics.

Fourth, it was growing stronger and bolder. It was an issue between capitalism and democracy.

His accusations included usury, drafts issued as currency, selling gold coin as bullion, trading

in its own stocks, gifts to canals and to roads, trading in real estate, subsidizing newspapers, lending over three per cent. of its capital to a cousin of the President, lending money to Congressmen, and many, many other items.

### Daniel Webster "Black as Thunder."

Next of the adversaries after Nicholas Biddle came Daniel Webster, accounted by many the greatest Senator the country has ever had. Webster was in the pay of the rising manufacturers. Of a sombre presence, whom Wright described in debate as "looking black as thunder" and sounding as loud, always immensely dignified and serious, yet not without wit and satire, profoundly philosophical if not also learned, the Massachusetts Senator with his magnificently sonorous voice would have overborne any other group of men ever in Washington. But it so happened that certain other men were there.

In one respect, the difference between Webster and Wright was antipodal. Webster had a portentous sense of his own importance; Wright did not think of himself. Webster was something of an actor; but of the histrionic Wright had no trace.

### Clay the Magnetic.

Inclined usually to assist Webster and yet in a measure detracting from his splendor was Henry Clay, the most plausible and perhaps the most brilliant orator of American history. Like Webster, the Kentucky Senator had the singular quality of personal magnetism, an irradiating personal effect indescribable yet undeniably. In fluency of speech, in rhetoric, in voice and elocution, and in tact, Clay overmatched even Webster; but he was less sincere and less strong. Neither had scruples respecting money or liquor; but Clay was also notoriously lax in private morals.

Like Jackson, Clay had charming personal manners; but he was far less sincere than any of these great men. He spoke the ideas of the North in the tones and with the language of the South.

### Calhoun the Political Scientist.

There also was Calhoun, among the greatest of Southerners, educated at Yale. The South Carolina Senator was a metaphysician, a political scientist and an ardent and skillful debater, an impressive combination. He was absolutely and inflexibly honest and righteous in intent. Over against the lurid Webster and the electric Clay, Calhoun shone like a white pillar of mar-

ble. And yet, though Jackson, the Democrat, was against Webster and Clay, the Whigs, he personally hated Calhoun, also a Democrat, worse than either.

This hatred was wholly personal and was due to his discovery that secretly in the Cabinet of Adams, Calhoun had opposed him and to his anger over the attitude of Calhoun in the Peggy O'Neill affair. Calhoun was essentially an aristocrat. As time, however, irons out the wrinkles of ancient controversy, humanity will think more highly of this man who faced facts straight and who never shrank from consequences. As high and clear a thinker as Webster, he saw yet further into the future.

### Benton the Statistician and Orator.

Fourth, but not among the adversaries, there was Benton of Missouri, a still too much neglected figure. Benton was a diligent student, a careful thinker, a fine speaker, and foresighted beyond Webster and Clay. Big and impressive, he was the artillery for Andrew Jackson. Wright did the lighter field fighting.

Not many decades hence the center of social gravity in America will be securely established in the Middle West. Then it will be seen that Thomas Hart Benton was the most important statesman of the period. He was the Western expansionist, answering the ridicule of Webster

with a red-hot flood of satire and eloquence all the more terrible because, beyond Webster, Benton knew facts. Thirteen years older than Wright and surviving him for eleven more years of life, he fills a greater space in our history. But Benton was glad of the friendship and constant assistance of the New York Senator, and they stood shoulder to shoulder upon all important matters.

Over against Webster and Clay set Benton and Wright, with Calhoun in an equal place by himself. No other period could ever match these five Senators. Among them all, in certain qualities, Wright was first,—in service, common sense and poise, in closeness with humanity, in pure unselfishness. But Benton was master of more fields and themes than any one else,—Benton, who lived farthest west and in the newest country.

It was but a small Senate, for there were as yet only twenty-four States in the Union. And yet at least three more able Senators require mention — Preston, whose perfervid oratory carried far in those times; Rives, eloquent apostle of Jeffersonianism, and Grundy, shrewd parliamentarian and skillful debater. All were men of whom history would say much but for the splendor of the great trio.

## "Wall Street" Figured in the Scene.

The process by which Jackson undertook to destroy the Bank was by vetoes to prevent the renewal of its charter and by executive orders to withdraw the deposits of government moneys.

As early as August, 1833, Senator Wright was sending to his ever faithful friend, A. C. Flagg, a letter that sounds wonderfully modern. It contains this paragraph: "I have rec'd a summons from the magician (Van Buren) to meet him somewhere in the vicinity preparatory to his writing to the President about the Bank, which I suppose of course means the deposits. I confess to you that that is one of the questions I am afraid of, and my fear wholly arises from the apprehension that some cursed Wall Street operations will be developed as having taken place in anticipation of the action of the Government which will be made to appear to have a kind of 'wool' connection with the movement itself. I have signified this apprehension to Mr. Van Buren, and I did so the more readily because I think it not unlike such men and mousers as Jas. A. Hamilton and Jake Hoyt to be concerned. I hope (that) all apprehension of this sort (is) wholly groundless, but you recollect I told you that a wise one at Washington urged upon me the indispensable necessity of an instantaneous

removal and assigned as a reason that he knew 'friends of ours in Wall Street who had made contracts to deliver stock on a future day to such amounts that a rise of one per cent. would differ an individual \$1000.' From all such 'friends of ours,' speculators upon the actions of government and upon its legislation, Good Lord, deliver us. I hope, as I presume, it is not his intention to talk with me alone upon this subject, but that he has called a council of the Regency or that he is to do so."

Some of the phrases and ideas are familiar indeed — "cursed Wall Street operations," "a 'wool' connection," "a wise one," "deliver stocks on a future day," "speculators upon the action of government."

This Hamilton was one of the eight children of Alexander Hamilton, whom fewer and fewer men rank as high as he was ranked by the Federalists. Hoyt was a typical New York politician. What "differ" means is obvious; but the word is no longer so used.

There was to ensue one of the most violent periods of American politics and business. The deposits were withdrawn despite a struggle with Duane, Secretary of the Treasury, and with Congress. But the Bank proceeded, of course, with its legislative effort to secure a recharter and undertook through judicial measures by mandamus and otherwise to compel the Government to restore the deposits. Duane

resigned only to find himself "ostracized, dis-owned, outlawed on all sides." And Taney took his place and did the will of the master of millions of men.

### The Government Surplus.

While this warfare was waging, many other questions came up. One of these was closely allied with the Bank matter. The Government had a surplus of funds apparently of forty millions of dollars and no debts; and it was proposed to give this surplus to the States, according to their representation in Congress. Against this proposition might be urged more reasons than one. It meant putting the sovereign States under the patronage of the federal government; or in other words, taking an important step in the direction of converting the federation of United States into a Nation and the several States into provinces. Strict constructionists of the Constitution could not favor this. And grave questions arose as to how to make the distribution and upon what relative terms to the various States.

The Treasury had placed the deposits withdrawn from the United States Bank in many various State Banks, which soon came to be known as "pet banks." The total on deposit came to be forty millions of dollars, that is, the apparent bookkeeping surplus. The bank-

ers used these funds for generous loans in their communities, whence arose such a fever of speculation as has seldom been equalled in any land at any other time.

### Nullification.

Yet more important than even the Bank and all the related questions was that of nullification. According to this doctrine, several States, indefinitely stated, might nullify an Act of Congress or an order of the General Government by refusing to execute it or by preventing its execution. The Union was only a compact. In a letter upon this subject to Flagg, April, 1834, Senator Wright said: "It is a new declaration of independence by the Nullifiers. The truth is that ever since the Preston, Poindexter, McDuffie and Duff Green Jubilee in the City of brotherly love, the nullifiers have been crazy. The reception of those men there has induced Calhoun to believe that he can carry the north, and this is the open avowal.

"Clay replied badly and crouchingly, and Webster looked as black as any Christian can."

In 1832 the Tariff of Abominations had been tinkered till it was a little lower, but not enough lower to content the Southerners. Raw materials for manufacturers still came in free; and the manufactured articles were protected. This, of course, helped the Northern manufacturers

at the expense both of producers and of consumers everywhere. South Carolina replied by declaring that the federal revenue laws should not be enforced within her borders. On December 11, 1832, President Jackson had issued his startling proclamation, which endeared him to the hearts of more people than even the New Orleans victory. In February, 1833, just after the entrance of Silas Wright as a member, the Force Bill so-called had passed the Senate 32 to 8. It was aimed to secure the collection of the revenue in South Carolina.

### The Unsolved Fundamental Problem of Sovereignty.

Two schools of thought respecting the Constitution have always existed in the United States and are likely to exist for some time to come. Conventionally, it is said that one school believes in "strict construction," the other in "liberal construction" or interpretation of that primary document. The theory of nullification strictly construes the Constitution. It is based upon the historical fact that King Charles I of England created "my Kingdom of Virginia," a sovereign and independent State, under the Crown but not under Parliament. The colonies were kingdoms; as such they were States, as the very name of our country, "the United States," implies. The States by the

Constitution delegated powers to a central government and thereby formed a league, but not a paramount State (or Nation) to be superior to them and whereby they were reduced to provinces or satrapies. It was evidently upon this theory that Texas, for ten years an independent nation, was admitted by joint resolution of Congress into the union of equal States.

In this period nearly all the leading statesmen were strict constructionists. The high fame of Daniel Webster proceeded from the fact that he provided a new theory to fit a situation. With magnificent oratory he "replied" to Calhoun and to Hayne of South Carolina, "expounding" what the world soon realized, a compromise and transitional theory by which both the central government and the several States were accounted "sovereign," the central government in an ever-expanding field and the States in an ever-diminishing field. Such was the "Liberty and Union" he proclaimed. The Inter-State War settled the matter by creating a Nation with a people for whom the central government, hitherto without a people, became simply an instrument. Webster was a prophet of a future more near than he dreamed. A state is force, government is its means.

Nevertheless, mere growth of population and persistent influence of climate and resources differentiating the people constantly tend to create a demand for more freedom for each of

these subordinate and no longer independent States. The inherent contradiction of the American political organization constantly recurs and renews its pressure upon public attention. Even before the death of Silas Wright, and more vigorously soon afterward, the South itself, through the Fugitive Slave bills, was appealing to national power to force recalcitrant Northern States to return runaway property.

Before nullification was abandoned as a theory and secession substituted both as a theory and as a practical measure, the South, through national power, sought to force its peculiar social institution into the national territories.

Until the principle of State's rights is clearly seen to be the defence of provincial liberties, one is apt to be misled by the constant iteration of the arguments and phrases of the centralizationists. It is so easy to think in the terms of "a national unit" that already Washington is suffering from a congestion of duties and of interests. Railroad and telegraph have facilitated the issuance of orders from a central office; but they have equally facilitated the arrival of suitors for hearings and of prayers for help. The people outnumber the "government" twenty to one.

Silas Wright held what was the standard view of the times and looked upon all centralizing movements and measures, direct and indirect,

with disfavor and met most of them with opposition. Yet so far have we gone in centralization that already the national government, no longer simply federal, costs nearly as much as all other governments combined. It certainly does not produce a benefit proportionately.

The very argument that John C. Calhoun of South Carolina so ably and adequately used for the support of nullification and against a high tariff was used within less than a decade by William H. Seward of New York to resist the recovery of slaves.

In truth, it is possible for a vast empire to cohere for centuries only when the central government is of but limited powers and concerns. A much-meddling central government dissipates its energies and cannot be strong. And also, in truth, a people remains strong only when it is wisely governed throughout its habitat; to secure this it must be governed locally by native residents intimately familiar with special conditions.

State sovereignty is near to the hearts of men. We love little lands,—Virginia or New England or California, the lands that we can know and whose sentiments pulse in our blood. For purposes of international war, let the New Yorker be first of all an American; but in nearly all matters of peace, this Union prospers most when the inhabitants of its many several States are loyal to local interests.

We feel the grandiose appeal of national ideas spread upon the pages of metropolitan dailies, of national monthlies, or delivered eloquently from the platform before vast audiences; but we are most concerned with local laws, customs and ideas. Greatly important to us as are the questions who is President and what is the party complexion of Congress, it is more important to us whether our local board of health has ample power and intelligence and character to suppress a nuisance or to overcome an epidemic. It concerns us much whether we have fiat money from Washington, but it concerns us more whether on the average one marriage in five or one marriage in fifty is broken by legal divorce permitting each party to marry again.

In all things, however, there is somewhere a just balance; and decentralizationist though he was, when Andrew Jackson declaimed his toast, "The Union of States, it must and shall be preserved," Silas Wright applauded. He was a unionist, though not a nationalist; and he knew the distinction.

He fully agreed with President Jackson in his Proclamation that nullification was "incompatible with the existence of the Union, contradicted expressly by the letter of the Constitution, unauthorized by its spirit, inconsistent with every principle in it and destructive of the great object for which it was formed."

With most other statesmen, Senator Wright hoped for "a way to let South Carolina down easily" while preserving the dignity of the central government.

### An Ad Valorem Tariff.

Then Henry Clay, father of "the American system," came forward to fix matters up with a compromise. The bill apparently abandoned the protective principle with its specific duties for a revenue plan with ad valorem duties. Wright served upon the committee that had the bill in charge and had often considered the subject before. He was keen enough to see the impossibility of dealing justly with a tariff system based upon values. What values? Those at wholesale abroad? Or at retail? At the place of manufacture, or at some central market city, or at the harbor of export? Those at wholesale upon the American coast? Or at retail in the port of entry? Suppose manufacturers, or exporters, or importers disagree as to values: what shall decide?

### Protectionism.

The fundamental fallacy of protectionism Wright did not see or at least never cared to consider. By it artificial profits are gathered together into a manufacturer's capital, or

prospective profits are capitalized into banking credit. Out of this wealth the manufacturer is able to pay wages and to buy goods. He is legally authorized to pillage. Out of his largess he may pay what wages and concede what prices within the market range he chooses. The protected manufacturer becomes a protege of the Federal Government and a parasite upon the economic life of the people. His personal interest becomes a special interest of the statesmen and politicians at Washington. Senators and Representatives are tempted to become agents of the will of the manufacturing class. Not only so, but the successful proteges of government so manipulate nominations and influence elections that their own paid attorneys become legislators in Congress: such were both Webster and Clay, as well as hundreds of lesser men since protection became the American system.

But though Wright did not worry himself about the fallacy of protectionism as a theory, he was exceedingly active in respect to one of its fallacies in practice. In his speeches and in his correspondence he frequently asked, Who shall say what per cent. of protection is really needed? Shall it be only the protection that will keep men of fair ability and industry afloat in the ocean of competition; or shall it be the protection required by fools, by the incompetent?

Recently we have heard it said by a President of the United States that the protective tariff should be high enough to secure to the manufacturer a reasonable profit. It would be but to paraphrase the familiar remarks and questions of Silas Wright to proceed in this fashion —Which style of manufacturer is to have the reasonable profit, the able man or the fool? If the fool, then shall the able man be assisted, when he can, to make a thousand per cent a year? If the able man, then shall the fool be deprived of the blessed help of a protecting government? When government has secured by law a reasonable profit to a certain established grade of manufacturer, shall it not proceed to guarantee reasonable profits to farmers, to lawyers, to tradespeople, to teachers, to journalists? Good sooth, are not these so dear to government as manufacturers? But for the rise of the slavery struggle and its consequences in a vast national debt and in a vast pension system, the tariff problem would have been solved half a century ago by a disclosure of its fallacy. In a world of changing supply and demand, no law-made price can long remain useful; hence, it can never be just.

### Clay and the American System.

It is one of the strange features of the history of protection in these early decades that

Henry Clay saw the fallacy of the theory itself. In consequence he set up protection by wholesale, protection for every one. Early in the administration of Van Buren he once exclaimed rhapsodically, rapturously in the Senate: "People, States, Union, banks—all are entitled to the protecting care of a paternal government." Clay meant to insure a good living for every one, an easy living securely and properly ordered by law.

One feature of the Clay Compromise bill earlier than this deliverance that Wright expressly ridiculed as puerile was a provision to reduce the tariff a little every year for eight years. Yet the bill passed with the support of Calhoun and of the Southerners.

### The Censure of Jackson by the Senate.

Not long afterwards Clay introduced the famous resolution of censure against President Jackson: "Resolved, That the President of the United States, in the late executive proceedings in relation to the public revenue, has assumed upon himself authority and power not conferred by the constitution and the laws but in derogation of both."

The battle over this resolution lasted for months. It brought up many questions: (1) The relation sustained with the Bank by the

government as its fiscal agent; (2) the power of the Secretary of the Treasury to control the funds as compared with the power of Congress, especially with that of the House of Representatives, the financial body according to the Constitution; (3) the power of the President to appoint to office and to remove therefrom, for "Old Hero" had put out Duane and put in Taney in order to effect his will in respect to the deposits; (4) and the right of the Senate to censure a President, since only the House could impeach him.

The President controlled the House of Representatives, but the Senate was against him.

Upon March 26, 1834, Senator Wright made one of his most celebrated speeches, objecting to censure without a hearing and closing in these words: "Grant to him, I beseech you, Mr. President—I beseech the Senate—grant to that old man the privilege of a trial now. Condemn him not unheard, and without the pretence of a constitutional accusation. His rivalships are ended. He asks no more of worldly honors. 'He has done the state some service.' Age has crept upon him now, and he approaches the grave. Let him enjoy, during the short remainder of his stay upon earth, the right secured to him by the Constitution that he has so often and so gallantly defended; and if, indeed, he be a criminal, let his conviction precede his sentence."

The appeal was the usual one in the case of Jackson; his great fame as the hero of New Orleans and as an Indian fighter for decades should exercise for him a dispensing power; and did. The resolutions passed the Senate but failed in the House of Representatives.

Fierce as had been the debate over the passage of the resolution of censure, that over the reception by the Senate of the protest by Andrew Jackson in answer was far more fierce. The opposition Senators succeeded in keeping the protest off the pages of the journal.

### Illness in the Summer of 1834.

This session of Congress ended June 30, 1834; and Wright went home a sick man. During the summer he managed to improve in health; but never again was he a strong, well man. This is shown not only in the lessened force of his speeches, but also in such small matters as a feebler handwriting and an admission here and there in his letters that his farm work consisted mainly in seeing that his hired men worked or that he finds it necessary to be careful about his diet and sleep. Henceforth he declined all public dinners and was far less frequently away from his rooms at Washington or from his home at Canton upon visits to friends. There was no lessening of mental vigor; there was a decided improvement in

clarity of vision. But the joy of living had lessened.

### The Power of Removal from Office.

In the next session, the opposition Senators tried to take away the authority of the President to remove officers in the executive branch. It was the same fight that had been waged in the first Senate when by his casting vote Vice-President Adams saved this power for the Presidency and by redoubling the interest of Washington in himself secured the succession to that office. It was the same fight that led to the impeachment of another "Andy" after the Inter-State War. This bill passed the Senate but was defeated in the ever-loyal House.

This struggle involved the entire question of the control of Congress over the appointments to the executive branch. Each branch thinks that it should be supreme, but ours is "a system of checks and balances" out of which the freedom of the individual is delivered.

The matter of tenure for life, as opposed to removal for cause not stated, with all intermediate degrees of tenure, has more than two sides. In American politics we have not yet arrived at a satisfactory and profitable conclusion upon this point.

## General Jackson and a War with France.

The last big battle in the Twenty-third Congress raged over the question whether it was safe to entrust the President with an emergency fund of three million dollars in case the threatened war with France over the neglect of that nation, in a period of political unrest and change, to live up to its agreed payments of the treaty of 1831. Finally, Congress adjourned without making any provision for such an emergency. But this debate had served a purpose politically valuable to Silas Wright in that once more he came forward as the protagonist for "Old Hickory."

## Abolitionism.

In the next or Twenty-fourth Congress, Senator Wright voted with the majority to exclude abolition literature from the mails. He did this in order to insure in 1836 the election of his friend Martin Van Buren as President. This vote of his, together with his vote against abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia, and his well-known opinion that, in order to change the principles upon which government legislates and operates, it is necessary to change the men, constitute what are called "the stains" upon the escutcheon of Silas Wright. The first criticism

is easily met in two ways. Militant abolitionism was not merely anti-slavery but anti-constitutionalism. Its argument was this: The Federal Government permits slavery. Slavery is wicked. Therefore, the Government and the Constitution behind it are wicked. Away with such a Constitution! In the second place, Senator Wright later pursued a course so strongly anti-slavery as completely to persuade the best of the abolitionists such as Whittier the poet.

So long as there was unchallenged slavery in Maryland and in Virginia, slavery could not have been abolished in the District of Columbia. To suppose, then, that it could be was totally to ignore the facts of the social situation there.

Abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia was the pet measure for trying the mettle of every new member of Congress. Upon it, as upon a rubber ring, the inexperienced member cut his first teeth. For four decades and more it was talked about and talked at with no seriousness on the part of any one save, perhaps, the new member.

Wright was ready to receive the abolition movement into politics, in the fullness of time, to make it an issue. It was his friend Van Buren who ran upon the Free Soilers' ticket in 1848. Had Wright lived, there might have been no need of such a ticket!

Such men as Wright made the North the land

of hope to the slave. As John Pierpont sang in 1840—

“Star of the North, thou seem’st to me  
To burn before the Almighty’s throne,  
To guide me, through the forests dim  
And vast, to liberty and HIM.”

Wright, however, was not so much the leader of reform as the wheelhorse of its practical legislative accomplishment. In other words, he was not a prophet, but a statesman.

### The Spoils System.

But Wright was a spoilsman! In respect to the higher directing offices, yes; for there is but one way surely to change measures, and this is to change the men. It is a characteristic of adults to have more or less fixed ideas. The formula, therefore, was—change the ideas by changing the men.

It does not appear that Wright ever went practically or even theoretically to the extreme of the saying of his friend William L. Marcy: “To the victors belong the spoils.” The later record shows this perfectly.

Yet Silas Wright was not an extreme civil service reformer. He had no idea that any man should have a vested right in any office, though but a clerkship on less than a thousand a year. To him an office with an income paid from taxes is not a property. He would have had no pa-

tience with the modern notion of permanent tenure until disability and then a pension till death, and perhaps to one's wife and minor children thereafter. He lived in a different age when agricultural lands were accessible and cheap; he was indeed a proponent of the pre-emption homestead system as over against Hamilton's system of never selling plots of less than nine square miles.

### Speculation in 1835 and in 1836.

And now was beginning to brew the terrible financial storm that we know as "The Panic." The dispersion of the government deposits and the payment of three-fourths of the surplus to the States, or in other words, free banking with other people's money, had led to such a pyramiding of purchases and of speculation in futures that men stopped work, potatoes went to two dollars a bushel, and much paper was used for promissory notes of banks as well as of individuals. Prices soared. New towns and additions to old towns were boomed. Steam-boat lines upon the rivers and steam engine lines upon the lands emitted vast quantities of stocks and bonds.

The nation was gone crazy over future gains. Prospects were capitalized. Public lands were cheap. Men bought them with bank notes. The government officials left the payments in the

banks as deposits; and the bank officials loaned them out on promissory notes. Once in private hands, the city lots and the country farms were sold and resold at ever higher paper money and unlimited bank credit prices. The speculators lived gloriously on their paper profits and dreamed of yet greater gains.

The sales of public lands were as follows, viz.: 1834, \$4,800,000; 1835, \$14,700,000; 1836, \$24,800,000. The government had sold the land at \$1.25 per acre. The same lands were soon marked up to \$200,000,000 and the notes in payment ran from 12 to 24 per cent. a year.

### Jackson asked for Real Money.

On July 11, 1836, President Jackson issued his famous and critical "Special Circular" requiring that thereafter all payments for lands be in gold and silver, intrinsic money of redemption.

That fall Van Buren was elected President, and the Jacksonian Democratic tidal wave swept over even the Senate itself. Soon Silas Wright, as the Democratic Senate leader, became chairman of the Finance Committee.

Nevertheless, both branches of Congress voted to "repeal" the Special Circular; and President Andrew Jackson calmly ignored the repeal. His last official act, 11:45 p. m., March

3, 1837, was to send it back to the State Department unsigned.

### The Censure Expunged.

The same session of Congress, however, passed a bill drawn by Wright reducing the tariff upon several items. The Senate passed a resolution to expunge from its record the censure secured by Clay a few years before. Andrew Jackson called this the greatest triumph of his life. Of course, Silas Wright of New York and Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri were the chief movers in this affair.

### Wright Re-elected Senator.

Despite opposition within his own party from three directions, Wright was now elected Senator from New York for a full term of six years. The bankers opposed him because of his support of Andrew Jackson, an anti-bank President. The canal politicians opposed him because as Comptroller of the State a few years before he had held up the building of probably unprofitable lateral canals. And some of the older party leaders opposed him as new and young and inclined to go his own gait. But his friends carried the party caucus; and the party carried the Legislature.

## The Panic of 1837.

After the inauguration in March, 1837, "Old Hero" betook himself to the Hermitage at Nashville, Tennessee; and Martin Van Buren, too able fairly to be styled his "creature" and yet truly made politically by him, gracefully went into the White House. Upon his devoted head the financial tempest broke. Never was man politically more unlucky than "Little Van" thenceforth.

The causes of "The Panic" were both general and specific. The general causes were speculation and a bad banking system, for bad as the United States Bank under Biddle was, wild-cat banking with State bank "shinplasters" as a feature was worse. In 1835 and in 1836 our people had been large purchasers of goods from Europe, and London desired payment in gold. The foreign bankers refused bills of exchange and sent everything of the kind to protest.

The Acts of Congress distributing the surplus in the Treasury to the States required payment by the depositories in gold or silver, which depleted the coffers of the banks.

And labor was growing dear, very dear, compared with the wages of earlier decades.

It was in this period that Silas Wright discussed carefully the relation of the wages of

labor to the monetary system and to the ebb and tide of prosperity. Said he:

"No capitalist, whatever be his field, pays more for labor than will command such as he requires, be the profits of his business what they may. When the wheat of the farmer, or his wool, or his beef, doubles in value, he does not in consequence double the wages of his laborers. When the adventure of the merchant doubles the capital invested, he does not in consequence double the wages of his sailors and cartmen. \* \* \* In prosperous times, labor is the last to advance; in times of adversity, employment at any rate of wages almost ceases. This compels the laborer at once to work for almost any wages he can get."

### Sound Money.

Gold and silver, with subsidiary coins of baser metals, constitute the only proper money for the poor man, who usually also is ignorant and defenceless. The rich and intelligent man can understand the operations of pyramided green-backs and bank notes; but the poor man deals in the obvious, and government owes it to him to make his money good, perfectly good.

What Silas Wright would have said of founding an empire of national banks upon a quick-sand of one billion dollars of national debts, and then refusing to pay those debts lest the banks

automatically cease to exist, any one who carefully reads his views of conditions in 1837 cannot escape perceiving. One per cent. of the total wealth of the people of the United States is obligated nationally to found through debt a permanent banking system! Individuals are warned against debt; but the nation is kept in bondage to creditors.

### An Independent Treasury.

For want of sufficient foresight by business men and by statesmen, the country that had sown the wind must now reap the whirlwind. The poor must riot for bread in the greatest business city of the land.

The story in detail does not comport with the scale of this brief life of Silas Wright. The main facts of interest in his career are that "The Panic of 1837" caused him to be the leader in Congress for the complete separation of government and banking through the service of an independent treasury.

The Constitution of the United States specifically declares that the Congress shall have power (Article I, Section 8) "To coin money, regulate the value thereof, and of foreign coin," but expressly reserves to the States all powers not delegated. Nowhere does the Constitution empower Congress to go into a banking business or even to charter a bank. Unquestion-

ably the two National Banks—the first, chartered in 1791, and the second, chartered in 1816—were unconstitutional. We all see this now, just as we all now see that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was unconstitutional, and as our younger citizens will live to see that a protective tariff is unconstitutional, whether it is wise or not, righteous or not.

But Martin Van Buren and Silas Wright were the first statesmen to see any way out of the dilemma as between little banks doing the government's necessary banking or one big bank, "a mammoth monopoly," as the latter styled it. Probably Wright was the real originator of the independent treasury plan. Upon this subject he wrote many letters and delivered many speeches. By working hard upon it, he finally grew into an anti-corporation man. Let us see how he felt and what he thought. In August, 1837, he published in the St. Lawrence Republican two long letters, one relating to specie payment and the other to the independent treasury plan.

### Open Letters Upon Banking and Corporations.

From the first letter: "The (bank) privilege of issuing, by express authority of law, their paper promises to pay gold and silver on demand as currency, to take the place of gold

and silver in the hands and pockets of the people, is nothing less than the delegation to them of one of the most delicate, important, and responsible prerogatives of the sovereignty of civil government. Their exemption from liability to pay any description of their debts, beyond the mere amount of stock paid in to the bank, is an invidious privilege to these artificial corporations over those extended to natural persons, the citizens and freemen of our country, that would startle every honest mind not familiarized by custom and use to the legislative preference for soulless paper existence over the persons of God's creation with hearts and souls and consciences and at least some sense of moral obligation. \* \* \*

"The bank that issues notes that it cannot redeem in specie \* \* \* practices a fraud upon the public for which a natural person would be convicted of the crime of swindling. \* \* \*

"For the last six or seven years, the people of this State, through their representatives in the Legislature have been much too indulgent in yielding to the cupidity of individuals, and the personal and unwearied solicitations of the interested for local bank charters."

He recalls how the people of the Revolutionary days suffered from depreciated currency and says that the troubles of 1837 are similar, though these concern not paper currency but credit instead of money; "excessive banking

and the cheapening of credits in every department of business."

The functions of the banker are but two, no more. The first is to act as a judge of the probability of the success of enterprises. The second is to act as a steward of already gathered wealth. He is an economic critic and treasurer. But he produces nothing. The uncritical banker and the spendthrift are dangerous.

From the second letter: "The power of Congress over the currency and domestic exchanges of the country is confined to the collection and disbursement of the public revenues, and consists in the power to prescribe in what description of currency those revenues shall be received and paid out.

"The only currency known to the Constitution is a currency of intrinsic value, a metallic currency, a currency of coin according to the value placed upon it by Congress. This is a fact too plain for contradiction or question. \* \* \*

"Twice a national bank has been tried; and twice have the people pronounced their verdict that it shall not have existence within our confederacy; that its powers to produce expansions and contractions in the currency, and overtrading, speculations, panics, and pressures are much superior to its powers to regulate, restrain or sustain our circulating medium; that the political dangers and evils arising out of it \* \* \* far outweigh any benefits; that

the Constitution of the United States has not conferred upon Congress any power to charter such an institution; and that no charter shall emanate from the hands of their representatives. \* \* \*

"What then can Congress do? \* \* \* Produce a perfect and entire separation between the finances of the nation and all the banks of issue or discount. \* \* \* We have tried the faith of these soulless existences, in all their forms of being, and that faith has always failed us in the hour of utmost need. Now let us try the faith of natural persons, of moral, accountable agents, of freemen. Let Congress trust the safekeeping of the public treasure with citizens as such and not as bank corporations, with men responsible to itself, and not to a moneyed institution. Let collections into the national treasury be collections of *money*, not of irredeemable paper.

"Explode the mischievous doctrine, now so generally promulgated, that the merchant or the speculator has a right to the use of every dollar of money in the national treasury; and when overtrading shall unduly increase the revenue from customs or mad speculations swell the amounts received from sales of lands, let the accumulations of cash capital in the Treasury check these excesses before their bitter fruits are realized as now in the destruction of credit, the derangement and depreciation of

the currency, the depression of prosperity, and the prostration of business generally."

Replying to Senator Webster, January 30, 1834, Wright said: "Mr. President, while I approve highly of the open and manly ground taken by the Senator from Massachusetts, I differ from him *toto coelo* as to the remedy he proposes. There is no inducement that can prevail upon me to vote for a recharter of the Bank of the United States. I would oppose this bank upon the grounds of its flagrant violations of the high trusts confided to it; but my objections are of a deeper and graver character. I go against this bank, and against any and every bank to be incorporated by Congress, whether to be located at Philadelphia or New York or anywhere else within the twenty-four independent States that comprise this Confederacy, upon the broad ground that admits not of compromise — that Congress has not the power, by the Constitution, to incorporate such a bank."

Those citizens who favor now or who think they favor a National Reserve Association or legalized "money trust" as a substitute for the natural laws of supply and demand in money and for persons as bankers might do well to read these letters of Silas Wright.

It is the old issue: Shall government be an agency of business, an instrument of prosperity? Or shall government be the supreme ex-

pression of the popular will, the voice and action of all men? Government separated from private interest and advantage, other than the hire of its laborers, is that "least government" which "is the best government."

### The Fear of Corporations.

The fear of banks by Silas Wright was due not only to their control of money, but also to their corporate nature. The plain man has always feared the money-lender, who toils not but reaps the first of the harvest. Yet so long as he was personal with a local home and family, the money-lender has been accessible even if obdurate and unfeeling; to the plain man, such a money-dealer has been comprehensible even if disagreeable when he withholds or seeks to recover his money. But the money-lending corporation is a much more complex matter. The borrower goes from one officer to another, who evade or refer responsibility; at this end of the transaction he meets individuals, but when payment is due the entire aggregation becomes collector.

The limited liability feature of the corporation, by which the stockholders are free to make unlimited gains, but have limited their losses to their cash investments, has always worried upright and downright men of the Silas Wright type. Here is a man personally rich, a stock-

holder in an insolvent corporation that will not pay a debtor who may be in need; and this debtor has no recourse.

What Silas Wright saw was that the corporation gives to the rich a new and additional advantage. In figures, he might have put the matter in this way, and he was apt to put such matters into figures: A capitalist has one hundred thousand dollars, which he invests in equal parts in four corporations. Three succeed and win for him seventy-five thousand dollars more; but the fourth goes bankrupt, owing five or ten times as much as its assets, for corporations have a way for running down to the lowest limit of credit against debt. By the corporation system the capitalist is worth one hundred and fifty thousand dollars now, and has lost only twenty-five thousand dollars. But others in the world through the failure of the fourth of his corporations may be a full quarter million of dollars the poorer, and partly because of this rich man, who does not now need to pay.

To Wright it seemed that the world is paying too high a price for the one excellence of the corporation, that it induces more freedom of enterprise. Often a man will risk a hundred or a hundred thousand dollars upon an undertaking, when not for a moment would he consider risking his entire property, as he does when he operates as an individual or in a firm.

At the present time, what we are trying to

do is to retain in part this feature while securing to the creditors of corporations much more safety. This we have measurably secured now with our National Banks with reference to their depositors through the double responsibility of each shareholder. And that principle is sure to be extended in an age when the corporation plan is being worked beyond the limits each way of largeness and of triviality of undertaking—from the billion and a half dollar trust to the incorporated fruit-stand upon the corner.

What with publicity and regulation, we may yet solve what seemed to Wright a most unfortunate and dubious legal, political, financial and social complex of problems.

### The Divorce of Government and Banking:

The bills that Wright presented were defeated in September, 1837; in December of the same year, and again in the next Congress. But upon July 4, 1840, President Van Buren joyfully signed an independent treasury bill, and Silas Wright had won his greatest fight, that for the freedom of the government and of the people from bankers. It matters little that the bill for an independent treasury was repealed two years later, for it was soon reënacted and remains to this day the law of the land.

That same year Van Buren was defeated for

reelection to the Presidency. The Panic of 1837 had made him unpopular.

William Henry Harrison died within a month of his inauguration. Some persons attribute his death to the horde of Whig office-seekers brought in by the new railroads; others charge it to a cold rain in a new climate bringing on pneumonia, which prevails in the District of Columbia.

John Tyler, his successor, lost his first wife within the year after he became President. This affliction paralyzed a judgment never decisive. Two years later, he married again; but this marriage, though personally happy, did not restore his political fortunes.

### The Vetoes by John Tyler.

In August, 1841, the Whig Congress passed a bill chartering a national bank; and John Tyler of Virginia, though he was an anti-Jackson Democrat, had to choose between his hatred of Old Hickory and his political philosophy of State's rights and strict construction. He promptly vetoed the bill. Next, Congress passed a bill creating a pseudo-bank styled a "fiscal corporation" or "fiscal agent." This also Tyler promptly vetoed. Then all of his Cabinet resigned save Daniel Webster, Secretary of State.

And the Whigs began a plot to force the

resignation of Tyler and to put in Webster or some other bank man.

The central bank crowd were indeed in fearful case. When the Bank of the United States failed to get its new charter, it still had over fifty millions on deposit. It spent four hundred thousand dollars in bribing the Pennsylvania Legislature to give it a charter, and succeeded. But it failed in 1837; again in 1839, and went to its final ruin in February, 1841. Biddle died in 1844.

The Hamilton school, as opposed to the Galatin school, write much of the war made by Jackson upon the bank, but sound history cannot fail to record that this war was like any other war made upon legalized crime. The standpatters for things as they are never like to draw distinctions between law-honesty and real honesty. The later history of Biddle and the bank shows that the war by Jackson was a holy war proceeding from righteous indignation. Sympathy with crime is maudlin.

But Tyler and men in Congress like Benton and Wright saw clearly that in decentralized banking lay the security of American commerce.

The five Presidents under whom Silas Wright saw office in Washington were John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, and John Tyler. As was natural, he understood best the

later ones, for he himself was growing older and wiser. His account of John Tyler is vivid. August 21, 1841, he wrote to A. C. Flagg: "If he (Tyler) had a single finger nail of Old Hickory upon his whole frail system, this (threat to withhold appropriations) would delight him, but unfortunately \* \* \* the melancholy fact is he is frightened to death at the recoil of his own gun, and is trembling under the apprehension that they will send to him their exchange bank (bill). He has said to several that it will not do for him to veto another bill, and supplicatingly asked in God's name what shall be done? Yet at other times, when his passions become aroused he talks, as I learn, as brave as a lion. \* \* \* His intimate friends hope to be able to hold him up, but they hope with great fear."

Tyler did better than his friends feared; he vetoed the bill establishing what Benton styled "the fiscal corporosity."

A bankruptcy law was passed and signed only to be repealed, however, within two years by the same Congress.

On March 31, 1842, Henry Clay resigned in order to retire (temporarily, as it proved) to private life. Webster was in the Cabinet. There was more room now for Wright in the Senate.

Tyler then proceeded to veto one after the other two tariff bills, in each case pleasing

**Senator Wright.** At last, the Act of 1842 with an average duty of thirty-two per cent. passed the Senate and the House by one majority in each case, Wright voting for it because the treasury was empty. Wool was raised thereby from twenty to thirty-two per cent.

“Pulling the wool over men’s eyes” is an adage centuries old; but it has fitted perfectly into all American tariff history. Shall the manufacturer know a fond paternal government while the farmer is coldly cast out of the household?

### Jackson Recovers His Fine.

In February, 1843, Wright was again re-elected by the State Legislature to the Senate. Just a year later Congress passed the bill refunding to General Jackson a thousand dollar fine with interest; he had paid it shortly after the battle of New Orleans for a technical offence against the civil authorities.

The amount repaid was \$2,700. He had violated a *habeas corpus* issued on behalf of a French citizen. It was a typical war case. And Lincoln remembered it in his contest with Taney in 1861-5.

### Postage Reduced.

Senator Wright also secured the passage of a law reducing the postage rates—as now could easily be done because of the cheaper service of the new steam railways and steamships.

## The Tariff Again.

Many, many "able arguments" have been delivered upon the subject of the tariff in the Senate and House; but no speech, not even that of Senator Dolliver in 1909, more adequately and fairly covers the ground than the speech of Senator Wright delivered April 19 and 23, 1844. A few paragraphs suffice to show the lucidity and vigor and breadth of this discussion:

"I will premise that it is the settled policy of the Government and people of this country to raise by duties upon imports so much revenue as the public treasury shall require. \* \* \* There may be individuals who believe it would be more equal and economical to raise this revenue by direct taxation upon the property of the country as a theoretical proposition; but I do not suppose that a single individual in the whole country contemplates a change from this indirect taxation to a system of direct taxation in order in a time of peace to raise the revenues necessary for the support of the Government. \* \* \*

"First, then, every duty is necessarily protective to some extent; because the foreign article must pay the duty, and the domestic article does not. In this respect it is immaterial whether the producer of the article in the foreign country or the consumer of it in

this, pay the duty. In either case, by enhanced price, the domestic producer reaps the advantage.

"Second, every duty is to an extent necessarily prohibitive. Any branch of trade wholly free from taxation will be entered into more readily and carried on more extensively than a trade that is taxed.

"Third, that rate of duty, upon any given article of import, which will yield the largest total amount of revenue, is the highest that article will bear, and affords the highest protection that can be given to it, when of domestic production, consequently with the object of raising revenue. Any less rate of duty is, of course, within the revenue range. Within this, the protection afforded is incidental to the revenue power of the duty; and if the revenue be required, the protection is a necessary and unavoidable incident, and cannot afford to any interest just ground of complaint. This I consider the true limit of the claim and right of protection.

"Fourth, every duty is a protective as contradistinguished from a revenue duty, when its prohibitive powers become paramount to its revenue powers. \* \* \* Now the positions are reversed; and the revenue derived, if any, has become a mere incident to the protection afforded. This is making protection the principal and revenue the incident. \* \* \* Such protec-

tion is prohibition, and the destruction of revenue. \* \* \*

"The power to discriminate as to the articles to be taxed, and as to the rate of tax to be imposed upon each, within the range of revenue duties, I consider perfect and unquestionable; and whether it should be exercised to favor necessaries at the expense of luxuries, the poor at the expense of the rich, to extend incidental protection to a domestic interest against the too strong competition of a foreign competing interest, or for any similar object, appear to me to be questions purely of legislative discretion, and not at all of constitutional power. \* \* \* It may be exercised against necessities to favor luxuries; against the poor to favor the rich; against domestic interests to favor foreign; or in any other perverted manner; but such liability to abuse does not disprove the existence of the power."

Proceeding minutely into the financial operations of the existing law, he arrived at this conclusion: "My examinations have satisfied me that a range of duties up to 33 per cent. is as high as most articles of import will bear consistently with the revenue principle."

Two years later, in 1846, a so-called "free trade tariff" was enacted. There followed nearly ten years of uncommon prosperity, during which, according to the old policy of Galatin, the national debt was again reduced.

## A New Epoch Arrives.

The same problems seldom are long before a nation for consideration and solution. A new epoch was now at hand. It concerned the annexation of Texas and with the annexation an inevitable war with Mexico. Tyler was for annexation. Thereby he hoped to win a nomination for the Presidency. Martin Van Buren, who had been defeated in 1840 by Harrison, was against annexation because it meant the extension and strengthening of slavery. He failed to get the necessary two-thirds vote of a Democratic convention; and Polk, who did favor the annexation of Texas, and was the right hand of the aged statesman of the Hermitage, was nominated.

Clay was nominated by the Whigs. He opposed the annexation of Texas.

To be sure of carrying the State of New York, the Polk leaders secured the nomination of Silas Wright to be Governor of New York, following his declination of a nomination as Vice-President. Wright got his news by the new telegraph and refused to believe it until confirmation by mail!

Yet, more than any one else in the Senate, Wright had forwarded the government grant for a telegraph line to help Morse, as the inventor himself always said.

In this period Wright might also have become

a United States Supreme Court Justice or a Cabinet Secretary. The world was wide open to his talents.

### Senatorship or Governorship?

The situation is worth considering. Daniel Webster twice resigned from the United States Senate as the member from Massachusetts to become Secretary of State; but Silas Wright (of the same Yankee blood and early rearing) resigned a Senatorship to become Governor of New York, and declined a Cabinet Secretar-  
ship. He had refused the Justiceship saying that the people had assigned him to an elective office, and that he would do their will.

Was it a question of rank or of party principle and obligation that led Silas Wright to make what proved to be an ultimately fatal political error?

Unquestionably, with any ordinary candidate for Governor running with them, Polk and Dallas would have lost New York. Silas Wright could save them; and did. All his party friends insisted upon his laying aside the four years of his term yet to run and going into the battle to save the Democracy in New York. He was elected by over ten thousand plurality.

### The Anti-Renters.

There was a new epoch also in New York State. The question of the rights of tenants to leaseholds and of landlords to feudal rents had gone out of the courts into the arena of bullets, of midnight arson and assassination, and of political intrigues correspondingly villainous.

What was left in law and tradition of the patroons was largely to be done away. We were not to have manors and manorial barons in the Empire State. The Anti-Renters were not protesting against such rents as we know to-day, but rents of a feudal nature with personal service and duty.

A new and economic regime was to be established; and an old social order was passing away in blood and feud.

It was before the new Governor to maintain order. Delaware County especially was in the hands of the Anti-Renters; ten other counties were disaffected. Though upon legal and ethical grounds Silas Wright sympathized with the democratic spirit of the Anti-Renters, his first duty was to reëstablish social peace. Murder and threat to murder must cease. Private war should end. And with the militia Governor Wright put down the rioting, broke up the gangs of masked marauders and "Indians," and made life and property safe. And then he recommended legal reforms.

## A Very Careful Governor.

The Governor did other things also. He tried to keep down the State debt and to prevent a State tax. He tried to prevent the incorporation of a multitude of little State banks lest honest persons of small means be defrauded by dishonest or incompetent bank-managers; and in banking to be incompetent is virtually to be dishonest.

The Governor had observed that the day of the completion of public works was always to-morrow. The Erie Canal is done? No. Make it larger. One public undertaking nearing completion? Start another. One undertaking is productive; try another, and charge its costs and interest to the former. Bank not upon the present but upon the future. And he predicted insolvency again like that which actually had come upon the State Government in 1841.

He was an excellent financier and understood the motives of human nature in the circumstances. Said he in his first message to the Legislature,—“The money-lender could draw as accurate a distinction as the people themselves between their means and their anticipations; when the means should have been exhausted, the anticipations might not command the required capital even to test their soundness or their fallacy.”

With the Whigs he had no sympathy. They

represented the speculative business men, the spenders.

### As to the Extension of Slavery.

He was asked and urged and forced into declaring himself as to the Wilmot Proviso, a national issue; according to the proviso of the young Pennsylvania legislator in Congress no new territory should be acquired for the extension of slavery, and no money paid accordingly. It was not a New York State question. For New York, Governor William H. Seward had already spoken upon the entire slavery issue in connection with various runaway slaves. New York was against slavery. But Silas Wright spoke decisively; he was for the Wilmot Proviso.

Senator Benton styled the whole situation, Texas and the War and the Proviso, "a tragedy of errors." All the North agreed.

### The State Convention of 1846.

There came up also the question of a convention upon the State Constitution, which many Democrats believed was in need of revision. The bankers, the politicians and the canal contractors were all against the convention. Governor Wright favored it. Among the propositions was one not to permit the Legislature and

Governor to make a State debt exceeding a million dollars; all over this should be passed by a popular referendum. Another was to submit more of the offices to popular election and to reduce the number of offices filled by appointment, including the judiciary; that is, to lengthen the ballot. The Governor favored both propositions.

Since 1894 New York State has had a Constitutional provision for a convention every twenty years. Wright favored such constant recourse to the people. He was a democrat through and through. Short terms for offices, long ballot, frequent reference to the people, economy in expenditures, government, therefore, fresh and strong for the people according to their will and at low cost, freedom of private initiative and enterprise; such was his program.

Now, we hear much of long terms and a short ballot, liberal expenditures for the general welfare, government by experts with permanent legislative commissions to advise and even to direct, a helpful, friendly, strong and active government. Such was not the program of Silas Wright.

### Defeated for Re-election as Governor.

By 1846 Calhoun had his will; Texas was annexed and slavery could go forward, and war

must come. Calhoun was never President; but though "Old Hero" made Polk President, he did the will of the South Carolinian! Destiny was manifest. We were to become a very great nation. Mexico must be trimmed.

Palo Alto was fought in May, 1846, and the Mexican War was on. The Northern "dough-faces" opposed the war on principle but in practice voted money and supplies. No Northerners believed in the war.

In the fall of the year, Wright was nominated again; but was defeated by eleven thousand plurality. The causes of the defeat were these.

First of all, the North meant to repudiate the party that was prosecuting the war; and Wright was a Democrat.

In the second place, there had grown up in the State two factions, the Barnburners or radicals and the Hunkers or conservatives. The Hunkers bore many grudges against Wright. One was that when he was Comptroller, he had favored a one-mill-in-the-dollar State tax instead of borrowing the money to meet a deficit. "Pay as you go" was his motto. Credit is a bribe to extravagance. Another was that he desired to leave the question of the making of big debts to the decision of the people, not of the ruling capitalists and of their politicians and lobbyists. A third was that he had opposed canal construction beyond the sure revenue returns.

In the third place, Governor Wright had pleased neither the Anti-Renters nor the Landlords. Indeed, the agitation was to continue for a decade to come. In the old patroon regions of the State he lost votes from both sides. In the fourth place Polk and the administration at Washington were against him because he had opposed their measures. There were new parties in the field with State tickets,—Abolitionists, Native Americans, and certain radical reformers seeking to secure to every family a home with land.

The first were very active. To their incandescent zeal we owe the forcing of the issue. Wright, however, could not be a fanatic; like Lincoln, he was anti-slavery; but he expected to see the evil cured without the surgery of war. Herein he failed as a prophet.

The Native Americans were frightened over the large immigration of foreigners. Nor were they wholly in error. Foreigners and the sons of foreigners were to slay three Presidents, to seek to slay a fourth and to wound an ex-President. This asylum for the oppressed of Europe has become a retreat for enemies of even democratic government.

As for the land reformers, they mistook a right cause for an issue. Such Western States as Oklahoma and California have adopted much of their program.

Other causes also were in operation. Wright

had been before the people a long time; and the people are very apt, in sheer weariness, to drop a man with a long record, simply for a change. Under the circumstances, he could not win against an eager competitor, John Young.

He had expressed himself at length upon the tariff question even while Governor. His explication was remarkably clear. He favored a tariff for revenue with such protection as was incidental but against a prohibitive tariff. He was not enough of a free trader to please that faction and too little of a protectionist to please the manufacturers.

It did not help him that though no civil service reformer, when he became Governor, he left many officers and clerks as he found them. In several instances, he even appointed known political opponents. For this, members of his own party objected to him; and his opponents within and without the party criticized him as "too easy" or as "too politic," according to their own temperaments, dispositions and views.

### At Home.

As soon as his term was over, the statesman went home to Canton delighted to have a chance to rest from public life. There he would be not a lawyer but a woodsman and farmer, poor and human as ever.

It is interesting to know that in February he drove home from Utica, a three days' ride, in a

lumber sleigh to Canton; and that she whom he always called his "dear wife" rode all the way beside him through the snow carrying a favorite bird, well wrapped up, in her lap!

Later in this year, 1847, in reply to an invitation from a friend in Maine to make him a visit, the former Governor wrote,—“I cannot make a visit to you this year. I have become a farmer in earnest, and I find little leisure for recreation. I labor steadily, and enjoy my food and sleep as no politician can. My land is new and hard to work; so that I have not the pleasure of show and appearance, but a call for the more work. Even if my business would permit, I should not dare to travel this year, as I should be suspected of doing it for sinister purposes, which would destroy to me all the pleasures of journeying, and cause me to be received and treated as a moving beggar, not for bread, which might be excused, but for favors I do not ask. After this year I shall be relieved from this embarrassment, and then I hope the time may come when I can visit your State and yourself and family, and have the pleasure of fishing with you for cod, without the suspicion of being a fisher of men.”

### Perhaps His Greatest Achievements.

History, perhaps, often fails to record what a statesman or other prominent actor upon the

stage of the human theatre prevented from coming to pass. There was one such achievement by negation to be attributed almost solely to Silas Wright, upon which he prided himself—so far as he ever took pride in anything—and for which we should hold him in grateful memory. He prevented Congress from passing bills to give away the proceeds of the public lands to the several States.

This was a favorite proposition of Henry Clay, who at times came very near being a veritable mountebank of politics. The notion was not to cede to the States whatever public lands held by the Union happened to be within their respective borders; but to pay over to them all pro rata of population the cash proceeds from the sales of lands. Of course, to do this would have been to put the States under dependent obligation to the Union, to knock awry all their financial budgets, and to make the Union permanent through its bounty.

The effects of such a policy would have been many. The States would have lost the sense of responsibility and the habit of self-help. The great work, by no means all honestly carried out, of assisting the rapid development of transcontinental railroads, would have been less possible and perhaps impossible. Homesteading and preëmption would have been carried out upon probably less wise and liberal lines. And for a time, at least, the central government

would have seemed to be to the citizens almost all-in-all. State enterprise would have been paralyzed.

Upon a small scale, exactly this has happened lately in New Jersey through the distribution to the counties of some three millions annually from the State corporation tax.

This policy Silas Wright fought year after year in a running fight; and steadily won.

Wright also contributed powerfully to that happy solution of the problem of internal improvements at government cost which suits us, all know, theoretically. J. Q. Adams and his political sponsors and forbears believed in a paternal government at Washington that would fix up a local waterway or run a good road wherever and whenever it was called for. The notion lingered in the mind of Clay as a beautiful vision. Wright would have naught of this. Let the communities themselves or the States attend to such matters. Better still, let them be solved by private enterprise.

Now, we all agree,—theoretically,—that only coast and tidewater, the Great Lakes and the greater rivers, should be cared for and transportation be developed upon them at the cost of the central government.

In this matter the persistent, quiet negative of the New York Senator kept the ship of state out of many a poor harbor and tidal river and

off the rocks of private pillage, which is public plunder.

Practically, however, we have not yet found how to manage our river and harbor appropriation bills, and in a confession of shame we call them "pork bills." We have the principle secure that Silas Wright had stated long ago, and had lived up to it consistently. He no more asked special favors for up-State New York or for New York as a whole in internal improvements than he asked prohibitive tariffs for New York manufacturers.

### Overwork, Mental and Physical.

Being weak from too sedentary a career, fatigued from official cares, with health broken by changes between the climates of Washington, of Albany and of Canton, and worn down with the strain of heavy public campaigning and platform speaking in the last few years, he realized that he was far from well. He had become corpulent and sluggish. In letter after letter to friends, he explained that he worked out doors all day, and in the evenings was too tired for correspondence. Yet in this period he wrote one of his finest letters, advocating "internal improvements" upon "the inland seas." Here, as usual, he had the statesman's vision.

In the bracing air of the Adirondack region, he became stronger. In the summer he undertook to do a farm laborer's work at haying.

Late in August he had attacks of faintness that he ignored. From the third of these attacks of heart failure, despite the attendance of a physician, at noon, August 27, 1847, Wright suddenly died. A few days before he had predicted his own death! Trying to avoid a collapse, his very activity had caused it. The case is strangely parallel with that of Senator Johnathan P. Dolliver, who died at the same age of the same cause under the same circumstances in 1909; and for this cause lost the Presidency.

These are pretty safe rules: never to change suddenly the habits of years; not to burn the candle at both ends; and, after fifty, to watch the heart carefully. But Wright had never been solicitous for his own health.

His death ended a powerful though quiet movement in the Democratic party to nominate him for President.

Of estate, he left to his wife a small frame house and a half-developed farm and a few credits, in all not five thousand dollars worth of property; but he left no debts whatever. He had paid cash always; he had never bought anything until he had the wherewithal to pay.

Such was the man to whom the merchants of New York were about to present when defeated and out of office and working as a farmer a silver service that cost twenty thousand dollars. Why? Out of that sheer respect which is one of the finest qualities of our human nature.

By his life, Silas Wright had shown the truth of his own principle that one who considers first and only the general good does in fact most help each and every honest interest and person.

With a natural instinct for the good, he had learned to think and to act upon principle. Not often is a man at once considerate and courageous; strong in emotions, in intelligence and in will. As a statesman, it was never the fortune of Wright to be exploited either by his party or by a faction of friends. As for self-exploitation, of that he was incapable. In these respects he differed wholly from Webster, Jackson and Clay. The Whig party made Webster; his Western and Southern friends made Jackson; and Clay maneuvered himself to the front. He was not histrionic, dramatic, tremendous, like Benton. He had none of the cool intensity of Calhoun. But he was far more reliable than any of these; he pursued ideals, but he pursued them dispassionately. His finest trait of disposition was that he loved even his most strenuous opponents; and they all admired him. He was quite as able an executive as he was legislator. As Comptroller and as Governor he made a record with which there is little in the careers of these, his peers, to be compared.

New York State may well be proud that this member of her household by his own choice became her own son by her admiring adoption.



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